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STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC PARALLELS BETWEEN THE 'COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE' AND 'THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD'

BY

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TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER WHO INTRODUCED ME TO THE COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE CHARACTERS AND TO MY HUSBAND WHO IS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

ABSTRACT

Striking similarities arise between the commedia dell'arte and the avant-garde theatre of the twentieth century specifically in plays such as Ubu Roi, Waiting for Godot, The Caretaker and Rhinoceros. The points of overlap between the two theatres occur in three major areas: the use of stock characters; the theatrical and humour techniques and the social atmosphere in which the two theatres developed. The character types that are found in the Theatre of the Absurd approximate those that appeared on the Italian stage with the difference that the avant-garde types are often hybrid variations and updated versions of those produced by the Italian comedy. The types can be easily divided into various groups: the zanni group who are essentially porters, servants, fools and clowns; the old men group which comprises pedants, fathers, merchants, and generally those who belong to the establishment; the Captain group, who are a group of foreigners or outsiders and who are overly concerned with their ego, their glory and their valour. A final group is that of the young who stand for the rebellion against the established values and nearly always against those of their fathers. These characters also demonstrate an affinity with gestural language. In both theatres there is a marked emphasis on facial expressions, on mime and on mechanical movements. The reason for this propensity toward the gestural lies in the fact that both theatres are concerned with 'action' rather than 'narration' or 'description.'

The contents of the two theatres operate largely on a balance between such elements as horror, criticism, violence and laughter, amusement and play. This careful balance is an inherent requirement of devices such

as the grotesque, satire and farce. Both theatres present wild distortions and exaggerations while they mock and deride. Underlying all the horse-play and merrymaking of these plays are the horrors and the violence. In these theatres there is a comedy which has a dual nature--it amuses and entertains on the surface but it shocks and condemns underneath. Some of the chief similarities which result from the juxtaposition of the types of plays is the regular use of 'lazzi' or comic turns; the tendency toward coarse language and sexual allusions as comic devices and a tendency to look for alternative speech patterns such as dialects, nonsense and other idioms.

Lastly in the comparison of the two theatres is the similarity of the social periods that gave birth to each theatrical phenomenon. Both developed in periods of war, disintegration and vast social and technological change. These events manifest themselves in the thematic fabric of the plays. Both become revolts against established traditions both in art and in society. They become the voices that cry against what is perceived to be the painful events of the world. They become not only warning signals but also a way to laugh at the horrors of the worlds that we inhabit.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	1
I	USE OF CHARACTER TYPES, GESTURES AND MIME	6
	The Zanni Group	8
	The Magnifico/Pantalone Group	9
	The Gratiano/Dottore Group	9
	The Captain Group	10
	Stock Characters in the Modern Theatre	11
	Mime and Gestural Language	17
	Notes	24
II	PARALLELS IN THEATRICAL AND HUMOUR TECHNIQUES	28
	The Grotesque	28
	Satire	36
	Farce - Part I	47
	Farce - Part II	71
	Burlesque/Obscene Language/Vulgarities	77
	Regionalisms, Dialects and Popular Language	84
	Notes	90
III	THEMATIC LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO THEATRES	97
	General Background of the Sixteenth Century	97
	Themes of the 'Commedia'	100
	The Twentieth Century	106
	Social Themes in the Theatre of the Absurd	110
	Notes	118
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

"As the avant-garde is, we all agree, revolutionary, it has always been and still is, like most revolutionary movements a turning back, a reappraisal."

(Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes)

INTRODUCTION

The reaction of shock expressed by W.B. Yeats[1] on first viewing a play like Ubu Roi and the violent controversy that such a production created are understandable in the cultural-historical context of late nineteenth-century Europe. In 1896 a play of this type must have appeared truly shocking and offensive to an audience that was nurtured on the naturalism of Zola and the realism of Antoine. Jarry's play violated all the rules of these two dominant theatrical schools. The play was anti-realistic; it used grotesque masks; the characters, instead of being everyday, common people, were vulgar, braggart types that resembled human puppets. The action proceeded neither in an orderly, sequential fashion, nor did it depict everyday events. Instead, it followed in a noisy whirl of confusion full of exaggerated gestures moving from the courtroom to the battlefield and weaving in and out of fantasy and nightmares. In fact, Jarry used many of the techniques of the farce and of the popular comedy to shock an audience that was not accustomed to such theatrical conventions. Ubu Roi became heralded as one of the first radical plays of a genre that was later to become known as "The Theatre of the Absurd."[2]

If one were to take this play out of its historical context and place it alongside some of the Italian comedies of the sixteenth century, its shocking quality might be diminished. Some of its contents such as the salacious language, the slapstick humour, the masks and the seemingly nonsensical dialogues would perhaps seem less absurd or outlandish. The character Père Ubu could then be interpreted very much like a hybrid of the two Italian commedia dell'arte characters "Pantalone" and "Capitano."

Père Ubu can be seen as a cross between the avaricious old man (Pantalone) who is slightly senile and full of delusions and pretensions to which he is blind and the boastful foreign soldier (Capitano) whose inflated courage and bravery quickly dissipate should he be challenged, and at which point he immediately resorts to cowardly behaviour. Much of the action of the play occurs at a level of "lazzi"[3] in which the characters exchange slaps, beatings or perform exaggeratedly ludicrous tricks. The humour of the play results largely from situational comedy such as name-calling, word plays, inversions, mistaken identities and juxtapositions of incongruous situations.[4] This Bergsonian type of incongruity is demonstrated in Ubu Roi in Act IV, Scene iii in which case a great discrepancy is revealed between the seriousness of war and the baseness of Ubu's reaction to it. At a crucial moment in a battle, Ubu becomes primarily concerned with his physical needs such as hunger and sleep. Looking even further into the traditions of comedy, the play Ubu Roi uses a song which can be seen as resonant of the chorus tradition and of the ancient mime shows and which was also commonly used in the commedia dell'arte.

If one looks closely at the parallels that arise between these two theatrical forms, that is, the Italian comedies of the sixteenth century and the avant-garde drama of this century, one becomes aware of strong thematic links. In the Italian comedies there is an overt concern with identity; frequently the characters are brothers or twins who have been separated at birth and whose identities become confused and often disguised. At times the character's true identity becomes masked so that they are not identifiable by their parents or their twin or their master thus creating not only a comical situation, but sometimes, a comment on the nature of

personal and social identities and roles. Similarly, in avant-garde drama one finds a concern with personal and social identities. In Pinter's play, The Caretaker, for example, there is, at times, confusion between the two brothers and also, the characters are identified by their occupations or by their behaviour. The caretaker himself has no fixed identity and is searching for one. Furthermore, there is a striking common concern in these two theatrical developments with the opposition of the social classes. In Ubu Roi one finds two distinct social classes, the rulers and the ruled. Quite often, the audience's sympathies are steered toward the lower, powerless classes. In Beckett's Waiting for Godot, one encounters the master-servant relationship that pervades the Italian comedies. Who triumphs? one may ask. In Goldoni's The Servant of Two Masters, in Bibbiena's La Calandria and in other similar comedies of that epoch, frequently the servant outwits the master and gains the public's sympathies. Is this because both theatres find themselves in an age that is dominated by a spirit of revolt and because they deal largely with social satire? Definitely The Theatre of the Absurd is a revolt against established tradition, against social and economic values and against established literary language and canonic forms. The commedia dell'arte and the Italian popular comedies, too, sought liberation from the ossified standards of theatrical forms. The commedia dell'arte emancipated acting from the tyrannies of the courtroom and established it as a bona-fide profession. It took drama from the courts to the open squares, where it became accessible to the general public, and later to the public theatre house. It liberated itself from the stifling conventions of the "commedia erudita." It released theatrical language from the academic restraints and began using dialects

and regionalisms for inspiration. It evolved into a dynamic form that travelled throughout the continent of Europe. Similarly, avant-garde drama of the type Jarry, Pirandello, Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter did much to free drama from the strongholds of naturalism and realistic representation.

In the following discussion I would like to outline more closely the salient parallel features between these two theatrical phenomena, paying special attention to the tendency of the avant-garde drama to look backwards to its forefathers for inspiration, and its eclectic approach in gathering its materials. This study is not intended to claim influence by the commedia dell'arte on the avant-garde theatre. Rather, it is concerned with tracing the kinship that exists between the two developments. This link, however shadowy it may appear at first, arises clearly from the study of the structural components of the two theatres and from the comparison of the social atmospheres from which each was born. For consideration of length, I will limit the study to three major areas: one, the use of stock characters; two, the similarity in theatrical techniques, and three, the thematic links between the two theatres. The chapter on thematic links will touch briefly on the social environment from which each theatre grew, but that would be a study in itself, and therefore will not be developed as a separate topic but only insofar as it is necessary to understand each of the dramas discussed.

NOTES

[1] In W.B. Yeats' The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York: Collier Books, 1965), pp. 223-4, he describes the audience's reaction at the opening of Jarry's play. Here is the full quote:

> I go to the first performance of Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi, at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, with the Rhymer who had been so attractive to the girl in the bicycling costume. The audience shake their fists at one another, and the Rhymer whispers to me, "There are often duels after these performances," and he explains to me what is happening on stage. The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of King, carries for Sceptre a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet. Feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night at the Hotel Corneille I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity has displayed its growing power once more.

[2] It is believed that Martin Esslin coined the phrase in 1967.

[3] 'lazzi' can be defined as kinds of playful tricks of the pantomimic, mimetic or verbal type. They are used as interludes that interrupt the action of the play momentarily and are sometimes used to reinforce or comment on the action of the scene. They are linked to what is now called "clown's business" that is, exaggerated and often complicated tricks, antics, gambols and other general comic turns.

[4] Bergson's work, Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, tr. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: MacMillan and Co., 1911), gives a detailed explanation of the mechanics of humour that results from incongruity.

CHAPTER I

USE OF CHARACTER TYPES, GESTURES AND MIME

To facilitate the analogy between the Italian comedy and the avant-garde theatre, it is necessary, to begin with, to give some background information regarding the different types of Italian comedies and, secondly, to set up an outline of the main character types of the commedia dell'arte so as to allow quick and convenient reference.

Most works dealing with Italian comedy of the Renaissance divide it into two types; namely, written comedy and improvised comedy. Written comedy refers to the 'commedia erudita' which is essentially an imitation of Terence and Plautus and which uses a literary and classical format and which belongs to the group of canonic literature. Many of the learned comedies are carefully structured into five acts and a prologue and many adhere to the three unities. The improvised comedy refers to the commedia dell'arte which literally means "comedy of the actor's guild"[1] and which is associated with popular culture. Its most prominent distinguishing feature is that it is not written down except for some plot outlines (scenari), some prologues, some monologues and bits of dialogue. It used a looser and freer form than did the learned comedy, thereby more or less ignoring the classical and literary format. On this point, I tend to agree with Herrick's conjecture[2] that since commedia dell'arte was performed by professional actors who were very adept at improvisation and who were putting on plays for the popular stage, they probably de-emphasized the literary aspects of the comedies and emphasized the popular elements which were more likely to bring in a larger crowd. They did this by reducing

the comedy from five to three acts; probably curtailing the long speeches and amplifying the ridiculous and the pantomimic, and by using music and dance throughout the performance instead of only during the intermissions.

Although it is true that these two seemingly diverse developments in comedy are commonly seen as opposite forces, they cannot be separated entirely on the level of their constituent elements. Such a clear line of demarcation cannot be so easily drawn. I see them as works which have similar components but with different emphases. More accurately, they can be seen as two strains of the same family. They evolved from essentially similar circumstances and were subject to the same influences. To some degree, both were influenced by the plots and characters of Terence and Plautus, by the Italian farce, by the popular folk tales, by the festivals, by the novelle and by contemporary Italian life. I am therefore, inclined to agree with Herrick's thesis that the two types of comedies are inseparable, commedia dell'arte being a popular adaptation of the learned comedy.[3] As a consequence of this conclusion, I may, for the purpose of this discussion, take examples from both types of comedies. To illustrate the elements of parody, the use of mime techniques, and the gestural tendencies as they appear in the avant-garde theatre, I will rely strongly on the commedia dell'arte, which has more applicability because it makes wider use of the farcical; it amplifies the absurd and the ridiculous and its character types remain more static as types, creating a definitely anti-realistic atmosphere on the stage. But I will occasionally refer to the learned comedies, not for the sake of contrast, but as works which illustrate similar tendencies. These similarities can be explained as the contact points, or the meeting grounds between the theatres, and although the

commedia dell'arte and the 'commedia erudita' had different emphases they shared many theatrical techniques, tricks and themes.

To establish a point of reference for the comparison of Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre, a brief outline of the main Italian stock characters follows. These summaries are taken largely from Pandolfi's extensive work on the subject[4] and from Lea's two-volume study on the commedia dell'arte.[5]

The Zanni Group: Servants, Clowns, Fools

The name Zanni corresponds to a dialectal deformation of the name Giovanni. The mask of the Zanni originated with the mountain people who descended to Bergamo to make their fortunes in the city. Here they undertook the heaviest work, that of the porter and later, the personal servant. The Zanni is not necessarily a servant, but he will always 'oblige.' The character evolved from a satire of the mannerisms and the peculiar language of these foreigners. The prominent characteristics of this mask are: laziness, immoderate appetite (gluttony), insolence, unrefinement, rudeness, crudeness and, at times, shrewdness. The Zanni is essentially a coarse, simple fellow who is good natured. In later developments, shrewdness becomes an integral part of his character. He is commonly seen carrying heavy weights and being beaten unjustly; he runs errands, spies, panders, jests and sings.[6] He is in charge of the love affairs of his old as well as his young master. His genius for parody allows him to frequently act as an imposter. He is often a talented artist displaying great affinity for juggling and acrobatics. The bulk of his dialogue is in the vein of the burlesque, ravings, salutations and protests of his betters. Frequently he is seen playing practical jokes and making great uproarious noises, banging

saucepans, breaking flasks or being chased. He is the performer of the elaborate 'lazzi'[7] effortlessly carrying out his tricks, antics and comic turns. He is essentially the focal point of the commedia dell'arte; without his anti-heroic presence no commedia could be sustained to such lengths.

The Magnifico/Pantalone Group: Old Men and Pedants

This mask represents the ridiculed old man who falls in love frequently and foolishly. Initially this mask was a parody of the Venetian merchant and the power of the mercantile class. Later it developed into the parody of a grumpy and stingy head of the family who is absolutely against consecrating the love between young people. Its most common characteristics are: a tendency to accumulate money without other aspirations, to be tedious and long-winded, careless, absent-minded and gullible. He is frequently an eavesdropper. He carries on with a courtesan and is always excessive in his amours. Magnifico represents everything that the young recognized and ridiculed in their fathers: avarice, an incapacity to modernize, close-mindedness and a deformed sense of the past.

Gratiano/Dottore

This is the companion mask to Pantalone. Basically, he is the pedant. The mask satirises the Bolognese lawyer, as a symbol of cultural refinement. He often mixes his vulgar tongue with Latin phrases and sayings producing a macaronic effect. His language becomes distorted to the point of humour and absurdity. This mask was satirical in the sense that it intended to shake off the weight of the humanists. He is a scholar who tries to be up-to-date in spite of his antiquity, and whose learning is somewhat incomplete, whose language pompously spoken gives the opportunity for mala-

propism. He recites distorted maxims and amuses himself with fantastic etymologies. He was the chief expounder of the tirade and the tongue-twisters in the 'commedia.' A description of Gratiano's gestures captures the pantomimic flavour of the commedia.

> twirling himself into a fume, look how he swings his arms and shrugs his shoulders; how he moves his lips as he mumbles and pants, betraying his usual absurdity in expounding and arguing.[8]

Essentially this mask parodies erudite presumptuousness and it satirizes professions such as the judge, the doctor, the academic and the spirit of professionalism in general.

The Captain: Braggarts, Outsiders and Foreigners

This mask satirizes military power (in the historical context and in reference to foreign oppression). It expresses the moral rebellion of the Italian peoples against the series of wars which had devastated the country. It also presented a chance to satirize the Spanish adventurers who followed Charles V into Italy and overran the cities of Milan and Naples. The Captain becomes an object of ridicule in the challenges which he cannot sustain and in his unhappy and grotesque loves. He is the arrogant, ambitious soldier who delights in displaying learning as well as valor. His fantasy is freakish and exaggerated. He is full of hyperbolic conceits; he is often a jealous rival. His cowardice makes a good scene, the challenge is no sooner accepted that he remembers a pressing engagement elsewhere. Sometimes he goes mad for love and, flinging down his cap, sword and cloak, goes off to drown himself. Lea describes him as "an ogre flown in with the essence of fermented vainglory,"[9] and she says of him, "he is magnificent in his absurdity, like some glittering, impotent dragon."[10]

Stock Characters in the Modern Theatre

The traits of these stock characters reappear repeatedly in the characters of the avant-garde theatre although they may not necessarily represent a single type totally, as they did in the commedia dell'arte. They are sometimes found as blends of two or more characters or as character types that have evolved to express pecularities that are unique to the time to which they belong. They are, in some cases, updated versions of the types outlined in the previous pages.

The play, Ubu Roi, which is the precursor of the avant-garde, is perhaps the most pure example in the use of the stock characters. Jarry himself supports the theory of the fixed types. In his writings on the theatre, he states:

> The actor adapts his face to that of the character, and he should do the same to his body. The play of his features, his expressions, etc., are caused by various contractions and extensions of the muscles of his face. ... The actor should use a mask to envelop his head, thus replacing it by the effigy of the CHARACTER. His mask should not follow the masks in the Greek theatre in betokening simply tears or laughter, but should indicate the nature of the character: The Miser, The Waverer, The Covetous Man accumulating crimes ... [11]

The fixed character types are emphasized in this play by the use of masks and also by the fact that the play originated as a performance by marionettes. The Père Ubu has great affinities with the avaricious, miserly old men of the commedia dell'arte. He is, in fact, a hybrid of the braggart Captain and of the Dottore/Pantalone group. He is full of ambitions and delusions about himself. Like that of the Captain his courage evaporates when he is faced with an actual confrontation. Ubu, summoned by the King (Act I, Scene v), looses all his courage which he had exaggeratedly displayed in the previous scene. Again in the seventh Scene of the third Act, Ubu

is preparing to go to war; he is sure the Czar will kill him. He trembles at the news that the Czar is going to invade. He says:

> Ho! Ho! J'ai peur! J'ai peur! Ha! je pense mourir.
> O pauvre homme que je suis! Que devenir, grand Dieu?
> Ce méchant homme va me tuer.
>
> (Il pleure et sanglote.)[12]

In Act II, Scene vi, he displays his greediness when he doesn't want to distribute the gold to his subjects. In Act III, Scene viii, again, Ubu plays the avaricious type in refusing to put up the necessary money for war. Ubu is to a large extent a satire on military power. He is ridiculed as a soldier whose display of courage has no substance and the parody of which is pushed to farcical limits. Like the Captain of the commedia dell'arte, Ubu plays to many hyperbolic conceits. Perhaps of all the characters that appear on the avant-garde stage, Ubu is the most absurd, physically as well as in spirit. He is also linked with a parasitical character like Sguazza in the work by A. Piccolomini, L'Amor Costante. This character spouts a philosophy that the only worthwhile goal in life is that of satisfying one's appetite; all other goals are vain and insignificant and the only true happiness of life is attained through gluttonous satiation; everything else is pure madness. Ubu too is a gourmand; his preoccupation with eating is so intense that being able to eat as much sausage as one wants is one of his primary motivations for usurping the throne.

Another avant-garde play that also precedes the period of the Absurd is Luigi Pirandello's Questa sera si recita a soggetto (Tonight We Improvise). One finds similar tendencies toward the stock characters which display certain traits that are resonant of the commedia dell'arte. In this play, the old man Sampognetta, or Signor Palmiro displays strong ancestral links with Pantalone. Firstly, as a stock character, he is identified by one single

characteristic, his whistling. Secondly, he is portrayed as the foolish old man, cuckolded and ridiculed. We find him in the cabaret scene blindly and hopelessly in love with a courtesan-type, the chanteuse. He is ridiculed by the others when a pair of cardboard horns are placed on his head and he is frequently beaten and abused by his wife. This suggests the situation of the foolish old man who has lost all his power except symbolically as head of the family. In the following lines he displays the typical Pantalone avarice:

> e poi finita, se Dio vuole, la cuccagna per costoro, di goder la vita a mie spese.[13]

In these lines he expresses his concerns with his expenses and accounts which are the constant considerations of Pantalone.

In Waiting for Godot, the character Lucky exhibits many of the characteristics of the Zanni. He is a type of servant, a porter and a personal servant at the same time, frequently carrying heavy weights and receiving unjust physical beatings as well as verbal abuses from his master Pozzo by whom he is totally manipulated. Lucky is a pathetic version of the Zanni; he is less comical than any Pulcinella or Arlecchino. He is also an artist figure; he is a performer who can entertain by several varied methods, as the Zanni should be. Pozzo says of him that he dances, sings, recites, thinks and generally that he is a skilled actor who has passed his prime.

> He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango and even the hornpipe. He capered.[14]

He has flashes of ingenuity which can be seen in his performance during which he delivers an erudite but obscure speech. (This is also indicative of the parody of language that was so common in the commedia dell'arte and of which I will speak later on). He is obviously capable of outwitting

his master in that he has taught Pozzo "all these beautiful things" and Pozzo gives him credit for having added a dimension of beauty and interest to his life. He says, "But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of common things."[15] To reinforce the idea of Lucky's role as the fool/servant, Estragon says of him, "he played the fool"[16] and refers to Pozzo as his "keeper." Pozzo embodies the characteristics of the Dottore and of Pantalone. He belongs to the class of the old men; he is the landowner and the master type. He is Lucky's master and he claims to own the land on which Estragon and Vladimir are waiting. He is arrogant, silly and pretentious in his mannerisms and in his speeches. After introducing himself to Estragon and Vladimir, he asks them twice if his name means nothing to them.[17] This is an assumption on his part of his inflated self-importance. He is seen delivering silly, nonsensically inflated speeches in the likeness of the tirades spoken by the Dottore. He can be compared to the pedant type, Prudenzio, who appears in a play by F. Belo, Il Pedante. This silly old man speaks in a pompous and artificial manner while trying to appear natural. He nobilitates his vernacular tongue by inserting latinizations. He does so to distinguish himself from the language of the servants and of the plebeians. In the speech that follows Pozzo delivers kinds of senseless maxims and he attempts to be poetic and to sound learned thereby inflating his speech to a ludicrous level. His pompous formality is completely out of place. Ostentatious phrases uttered by Pozzo, such as the following, demonstrate clearly the satirical intent of the character in the play and the link with the commedia dell'arte's Dottore.

> Gentlemen, I am happy to have met you ... Yes, yes, sincerely happy. Yes the road seems long when one journeys all alone for ... yes ... yes, six hours, that's right, six hours on end, and never a soul in sight. ... Touch of autumn in the

> air this evening. ... Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes even when the likeness is an imperfect one. ... That is why, with your permission, I propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any further ... The fresh air stimulates the jaded appetite.[18]

In addition he is merciless and abusive towards his servant, expecting Lucky to miraculously resolve all the problems and blaming him for things which are completely out of his control. This reflects the commedia dell'arte in that the Zanni was always responsible for his master's failures, as well as any other external circumstances upon which one can have no control. Hence the Zanni can be blamed and beaten if bad weather ruins the master's plans for a picnic in the country. Pozzo throws away the bones after he has gorged himself on a lunch of chicken and wine while the others watched. This reinforces his avaricious nature. He is tedious in his expectations of Lucky and he gives long, detailed speeches on trivial matters such as smoking. He is pedantic; he states that he has explained the twilight to Estragon and Vladimir; he considers himself an expert in certain areas. He overplays his generosity, expecting gratitude from such actions as having given away the bones of his lunch. In the true vein of the comic type, Pozzo shows absent-mindedness and forgetfulness. He misplaces his pipe and his pulverizer; he cannot remember things from one day to the next and he cannot keep things straight such as Godot's name; he tries three different versions of it, Godot, Godet, Godin.

Lastly in the discussion of stock characters are Harold Pinter's plays. The character Davies in <u>The Caretaker</u> fits into the categories of the servant types. Significantly, he is referred to as the caretaker and his last employment was that of the server of tea in a cafe. He meets the requirements of the Zanni in that he is unjustly abused by the masters of the landowners. Firstly, he is thrown out of the cafe and beaten by the

clients; secondly, he is mistreated by Mick.[19] He fits Lea's condition that he doesn't necessarily have to be a servant but he must be willing to 'oblige.' In this Davies fulfills the role; he is willing to stay on in the Mick/Aston household to 'look after things.' Mick blames Davies for things which he is not responsible for. He further abuses him verbally by calling him a "wild animal and a barbarian."[20] Davies also resembles the Zanni in that he cannot resist playing the brothers against each other and creating enmities or rivalries for his own fun. He is a mischief-maker, in a sense. In another Pinter play, The Homecoming, we again find evidence of this tendency toward stock characters. In this work, the father figure is a senile old man who plays the tyrant, but whose power as the head of the family is largely ineffectual. Like many of the Pantalone types in the commedia dell'arte, he too is cuckolded in his own family and he seeks the love and affection of a younger woman, Ruth, who plays the courtesan role. In The Birthday Party the Goldberg-McCann team also operate as stock characters. They can be compared to the Pozzo-Lucky pair in Godot. They are also a master-servant pair with Goldberg giving out the orders and McCann carrying them out. As a master type, Goldberg is more frightening than any commedia dell'arte tyrant; he is a nightmare figure, a true bogey-man who comes out of the dark to haunt Stanley. But he also has his foolish side. Like Pozzo he is egotistical and he spouts off a lot of pseudo-philosophical beliefs and observations. He is as boastful as any Captain; he speaks about his good position, about his cultured background, about his solid morality and about his wonderful manners. Here is a statement in which he boasts about his good taste:

> That's the sort of man I am. Not size but quality. A little Austin, tea in Fullers, a library book from Boots, and I'm satisfied.[21]

These words demonstrate his pride in his middle-class values and his lack of analytical skills, along with his overrated importance placed on social pomp. Like the commedia Captain, he is flirtatious with the women; he plays amorous games with Lulu and flatters Meg. There are other stock characters in this play. Petey, Meg's husband, is a cuckolded old man and Lulu is a young coquette/courtesan type.

Mime and Gestural Language

Another significant area of overlapping between the Italian comedy and the avant-garde theatre is the pervasive use of mime and of gestures. Many examples can be quoted from the plays chosen as representative pieces. It is noteworthy that Ubu Roi was first performed by marionettes in 1888. Ubu Roi is saturated with instances of exaggerated gestures. It is incidents like Mère Ubu's shrugging her shoulders; Père Ubu slapping his forehead; throwing the broom; the guests who taste and suddenly fall to the ground poisoned,[22] which account for the puppet-like actions which recall the art of mime. If one reads through the stage directions of this play, one becomes aware of a continuous string of physical actions punctuated with exaggerated gestures. They also suggest a certain elasticity of body, of the type that acrobats and jugglers display. A sampling of these stage directions which will illustrate the mimetic and gestural flavour of the play follows:

1. Père Ubu throws himself upon Captain Bordure to embrace him.
2. Père Ubu falls as he turns; the King picks him up.
3. La Reine falls in the snow.
4. Bougrelas falls in prayer of the most violent despair.
5. Père Ubu throws the nobles in the cellar as if they were marionettes.

These gestures, as in the tradition of mime, are magnified to make the image clearer to the spectator and also they not only suit the action of the word, but they go beyond words to portray a level of deeper meaning. They are actions, in a sense that are larger than life. Also these characters lose their physical weightiness and are constantly up and down in a puppet-like and somewhat mechanical manner. The resistance of the physical world seems to have been overcome. For example, doors are continuously broken down, without offering any resistance.[24] Let us once again look at the exaggeration of these actions.

1. Ubu jumps over the hole; the Czar falls in.
2. Ubu falls sleeping.
3. He talks in his sleep.[25]

There is a noticeable tendency to break down the barriers of the realistic world by creating the atmosphere of the puppet theatre in which credulity is suspended to follow the adventures of these life-like puppets. This in the Bergsonian sense, is the puppet into which the comic breathes life. It is evocative of that which is mechanical, and in that sense, it becomes comedy. It becomes comedy because it draws out attention to the physical world, and to that which we take for granted. Also, in the tradition of the commedia dell'arte, Ubu Roi is a play which contains exaggeratedly loud noise with the characters beating upon each other, chasing each other on and off stage and bantering back and forth.

With Beckett, one notices an increasing tendency toward mime. Waiting for Godot relies heavily on mime and gesturing. When one reads the stage directions that accompany the dialogue, one is immediately struck by how numerous they are and how frequently they occur. Many of them are concerned

with the portrayal of mood changes, either through tone of voice or facial expression. From the example of stage directions quoted below, one notices that on a single page there are many shifts which demand from the actor a sensitivity and flexibility of the body that allow him to portray the intended meaning through physical gestures or facial expression. Here for example, are the mentioned stage directions; these have been extracted from one single page very early in the play:

decisively/gloomily/cheerfully/feebly/angrily/pointing[26]

At least five shifts in mood can be noted within a span of about twenty-five lines. This points to the great emphasis placed on the 'physical language' of Waiting for Godot.

Many more examples can be cited which illustrate this emphasis. One of these is Vladimir's repeated hat gesture which he performs, with little variation, several times during the play. (Here the influence is also derived from the clown's tricks or lazzi, but this will be treated separately on a section in Chapter II). Vladimir takes off his hat, peers into it, taps it or blows into it and puts it on again. This action is suggestive of the mime technique in which an action is repeated by the performer as though it were incredulous. Another similar action is Estragon's concern with his boots. He is frequently seen searching for his boots; putting them on or taking them off. This is also another way of recognizing characters by attaching one peculiar action that can be appropriated to them uniquely, like Sampognetta's whistling. The two particular gestures assigned to Vladimir and Estragon help us identify and separate one character from the other.

The presence of mime can also be found in a character like Lucky whose

actions are typified by the tyrannically mechanical orders of Pozzo.

> Up pig!
> Up hog! (Noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage)
> Back!
> Stop! (Lucky stops)
> Turn! (Lucky turns)
> Closer! (Lucky advances)
> Stop! (Lucky stops)
> Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.)[27]

From this sequence of actions Lucky is perceived as an automaton whose actions are totally controlled by the strings which Pozzo holds and manipulates. In the case of Lucky, these are neither imaginary nor figurative strings since he actually wears a rope around his neck from which Pozzo delivers his commands. Mime is sometimes stated explicitly in the stage directions, as in this instance: "He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin."[28] The exaggerated gesture occurs throughout the play. The sudden shift from one expression to another which can be noted in the next passage serves to emphatically draw attention to each action by juxtaposing it with its opposite. In other words, each expression is a kind of antithesis of the other. Hence the contrast also serves to amplify the exaggeration.

> Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.
>
> He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.[29]

With the exception of Lucky's long speech, there is virtually no dialogue in the play that is not immediately supported by stage directions. About forty percent of the play is dedicated to stage directions which are

concerned largely with the performer's stance or facial expression. It would seem, then, that Waiting for Godot relies strongly on this kind of non-verbal communication for its total effect. Without the stage directions it would be difficult to envision the play from reading it. Paying attention to this emphasis placed on the physical movements, the play becomes more obviously linked to the commedia dell'arte's propensity for mime. The numerous stage directions approximate the sketchiness of the commedia's plot outlines. Is this play, in fact, with its stripped-down plot, its reduced language and its extensive gestural language an imitation of the scenari? In an earlier Beckett play, Act Without Words I, there is even more evidence of the avant-garde tendency toward mime. Act Without Words I is a mime play with no dialogue, which resembles a commedia dell'arte scenario even more closely than Waiting for Godot. In the former, a man is tempted to action by the sight of certain floating unattainable objects and by the sound of a whistle. This shows that Beckett experimented with various theatrical idioms as alternatives to the dialogue; one such area is obviously the mime.

Pinter's works are mimetic in yet a different way; they are less uproarious than Jarry's Ubu Roi and contain less of the clown tradition than do Beckett's works. The flavour of the mime and of the mechanical in Pinter is achieved in a way that is converse to Jarry's speeded up pace. Pinter's action, instead is slowed down. The action of the play becomes slower and much more reflective and, as a result, exaggerates the action of the players. In The Caretaker, specifically, there is a lot of standing silently and looking which tends to draw attention to the action itself. Then there are instances of actions which are repeated, as in the following

example in which Aston's actions are punctuated by three turns.

> Aston is fastening his trousers, standing by the bed. He straightens his bed. He turns, goes to the centre of the room and looks at Davies. He turns, puts his jacket on, turns, goes towards Davies and looks down on him.[30]

If one imagines this on the stage, it acquires a kind of slow, mystical rhythm which belongs to the worlds of the puppets and the mime and the dumb-show. Another look at a set of stage directions reveals this same kind of emphasis on physical action which reminds one of the mime. The mimetic flavour here is found in the fact that, like the mime, each action is fully completed before the next one is initiated and by the use of repetition which becomes one of the techniques of clarification. In the passage quoted below this drawing out of the action is apparent in the repetitions and in the pauses between each one.

> Davies goes to the door, opens it, looks out, closes it, stands with his back to it, turns swiftly, opens it, looks out.[31]

Further on the same page, this kind of repetition and careful punctuation continues; here is its description: "he opens the case, shuts the case, looks out the window."[32] It is important to note that these actions are performed in silence and seem to be slower than a normal speed and are intermittently filled with a lot of fidgetting, rising and sitting and looking around. Even something as simple as turning on the light is slowed down and repeated so as to draw attention to an action which is normally taken for granted and is performed in an automatic way. Instead here is the way that it appears in this play,

> he tries the lightswitch, on, off,
> on, off.[33]

Again the emphasis on physical movement stands out in the stage directions:

he moves, he stumbles,
moves, stumbles and cries out.[34]

The spectator is forced to notice the meaning of these physical actions, largely because the silence that follows them redirects the attention back to them.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated how the avant-garde theatre, as represented by the works chosen, makes wide usage of mime and gestures. It points to the tendency toward the use of types instead of fully developed characters. It is not so much that one feels strongly the similarities between the Italian improvised comedy and the avant-garde theatre of our century as that the flavour and spirit of these two diverse theatres approximate each other and that the similarity in their components stands out when they are placed side by side. The striking difference that results from juxtaposing these two types of plays is that the clowning that is found in the avant-garde theatre which reminds one of the commedia dell'arte is no longer just humour. In the avant-garde theatre it has been invested with a deeper sense of pathos. It tends to elicit a much more reflective response, emphasizing that which is bleak and somber rather than that which is light and comical.

NOTES

[1] This is Kenneth McKee's definition which appears in the Foreword of Scenarios of the Commedia dell'arte. Flaminio Scala's Il Teatro delle favole rappresentative. tr. Henry F. Salerno (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. xiii.

[2] Marvin T. Herrick, Italian Comedy in the Renaissance (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 222. Here is the full paragraph in which he states the mentioned thesis.

> The commedia dell'arte was not only intimately connected with the commedia erudita but often was inseparable. The Italian comedies based their plots, their characters and even their speeches on the learned comedy. They usually made these plots, characters and speeches broader, more obvious, more ridiculous and put more emphasis on pantomime. ... One is tempted to conjecture that the professionals curtailed many of the long winded speeches that most learned comedies abounded in. The fact that the scenarios were divided into three acts instead of five supports such a conjecture. ... No historian can accurately evaluate the inevitable compromise in actual production between the written word or action. He must assume, however, that the professionals of the commedia dell'arte excelled in acting and therefore put literature second, as indeed it should be put when a play is performed on a popular stage.

[3] Herrick, p. 222.

[4] Vito Pandolfi, ed., La commedia dell'arte, 6 vols. (Florence: Edizioni Sansoni Antiquariato, 1967).

[5] Kathleen M. Lea. Italian Popular Comedy. A Study in the Commedia della'arte, 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the English Stage, 2 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934).

[6] Lea. p. 57.

[7] Lea. p. 66, for a fuller and more detailed definition of the word

lazzi and derivation and evolution in the commedia dell'arte.

[8] Lea. p. 27.

[9] Lea. p. 47.

[10] Lea. p. 44.

[11] Alfred Jarry, "On the Futility of the "Theatrical" in the Theatre" in Ubu Roi, tr. Barbara Wright (New York: New Directions Publishings Corporation, 1961), pp. 179-80.

[12] Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi suivi de Ubu enchaine, (Paris: Livre Club du Libraire, 1965), p. 74.

[13] Luigi Pirandello, Questa sera si recita a soggetto (Verona: Mondadori, 1970), p. 29. My own English translation of the passage follows:

> ... and then will end, God permitting, the good fortune of those who enjoy life on my expenses.

[14] Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, tr. by author, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954), pp. 26-7. In these pages Pozzo talks about Lucky's performing abilities.

[15] Beckett. pp. 22 a & b.

[16] Beckett. p. 39b

[17] Beckett. p. 15b.

[18] Beckett. pp. 16b - 17a.

[19] Harold Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 29. At the end of Act I Mick enters and immediately begins to harass Davies; here are the stage directions that explain his

actions which can be described as unnecessarily violent toward Davies, who is a stranger.

> Mick slides across the room.
>
> Davies half turns, Mick seizes his arm and forces it up his back. Davies screams.
>
> Uuuuuuuhhh! Uuuuuuuhhh! What! What! What! Uuuuuuuhhh!
>
> Mick swiftly forces him to the floor, with Davies struggling, grimacing, whimpering and staring.
>
> Mick holds his arm, puts his other hand to his lips, then puts his hand to Davies' lips. Davies quietens. Mick lets him go. Davies writhes. Mick holds out a warning finger. He then squats down to regard Davies. He regards him, then stands looking down on him. Davies massages his arm, watching Mick. Mick turns slowly to look at the room. He goes to Davies' bed and uncovers it. He turns, goes to the clothes horse and picks up Davies' trousers. Davies starts to rise. Mick presses him down with his foot and stands over him. Finally he removes his foot. He examines the trousers and throws them back. Davies remains on the floor, crouched. Mick slowly goes to the chair, sits and watches Davies expressionless.

[20] The Birthday Party, pp. 73-4.

[21] The Birthday Party, p. 56.

[22] Ubu Roi, Fr. text. Here are the stage directions as they appear in the text and which are suggestive of gestural language.

> I, ii, p. 17. haussant les épaules.
> I, iii, p. 21. se frappant le front.
> I, iii, p. 22. (Plusiers goûtent et tombent empoisonnés.)

[23] Ubu Roi, Fr. text. Here are the references in full as they appear in the text.

> I, iv, p. 25. "se jetant sur lui pour l'embrasser."
>
> I, vi, p. 30. (Il tombe en se retournant.)
> le relevant
>
> II, v, p. 44, Elle tombe sur la neige.
>
> II, v, p. 46. (Il tombe en proie au plus violent désespoir.)
>
> III, ii, p. 57, (Il le prend avec le crochet et le passe dans le trou.)

[24] Ubu Roi, Fr. Test, p. 64, the stage directions read as follows: "(la porte est défoncée, Ubu pénètre suivi d'une légion de grippe-sous.)"

[25] Ubu Roi, Fr. test, the stage directions appear as follows:

IV, iv, p. 95, (Il se rue sur le Czar.)
(Il se sauve. le Czar le poursuit.)
(Il sauve le fossé. Le Czar y tombe.)

IV, vi, p. 107, (Il tombe endormi.)

IV, vii, p. 109, parle en dormant.

[26] Beckett, p. 7b.

[27] Beckett, pp. 16 a & b.

[28] Beckett, p. 46b.

[29] Beckett, p. 8b.

[30] The Caretaker, p. 22.

[31] The Caretaker, pp. 27-8.

[32] The Caretaker, p. 28.

[33] The Caretaker, p. 44.

[34] The Caretaker, p. 45.

CHAPTER II

PARALLELS IN THEATRICAL AND HUMOUR TECHNIQUES

This chapter looks at some of the salient elements which invite comparison between the two theatrical developments. Many of them are connected with the techniques of humour; in fact, this appears to be the significant point of overlap between the Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre. This chapter will outline these similarities by concentrating on areas such as the grotesque, satire, farce, the tradition of clowning, the use of dialects and regionalisms, the burlesque, the vulgar and the obscene. The constant meeting ground of these two types of theatres lies in the fact that the avant-garde, although conveying a more cynical world view, uses the same comical structures as do the Italian comedies of the sixteenth century. What constantly arises in the works studied from both periods is an inclination to distort, to mock and to expose.

The Grotesque

> "By the word 'grottesco' the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one - a world which the realm of inanimate things no longer separated from those of plants, animals and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry and proportion are no longer valid."[1]

The grotesque plays an important role in both the Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre; it emerges in these two theatres in varied forms and shapes. The grotesque is commonly recognized by its distorting mirror and the effect of foreboding that it causes. It can be identified

by the allusions that it makes to the unknown and its disfigurations. It is a state between laughter and terror.

From the myriad illustrations that are available on the commedia dell'arte, it is easy to perceive the element of the grotesque that its characters embody, both in their physical characteristics and in their body movements. The etchings of Jacques Callot in Balli di Sfessania[2] are particularly good in capturing the flavour of the dances, stances, poses, movements and facial expressions of these characters. Perhaps Callot's etchings tend to lean too far towards the grotesque; nevertheless, they are some of the most reputed surviving illustrations of the genre. One of the areas in which the physical distortions of the characters is most apparent is in the masks what were worn, which were often black, covering the entire face, from chin to forehead. Many of the masks are characterized by long, beak-like noses and large round openings for the eyes which give a bug-like impression. The chins were sometimes covered with shaggy, untended beards, or, in the case of the old men, they had long, pointed beards protruding outwards from their chins. These features give the characters an animal-like appearance, reminding us of predatory birds or foolishly vain goats. Hence the grotesque reduction from the human to the animal shape. In addition to the characteristics of the masks, the commedia dell'arte characters sometimes wore plumed hats, again giving a bird-like guise. Furthermore, in Callot's illustrations, one often finds attachments of erect hats on the characters' heads; these create the illusion of horns. Looking at illustrations which try to capture the commedia dell'arte characters in action, one usually finds abundant examples of movements which are achieved by contortion and distortion of the body.

Often the bodies are twisted into unnaturally misshapen poses, the torsos are exaggeratedly thrown forwards or backwards; balancing is often done on the toes or on one leg thereby changing the natural and secure two-footed stance of the human being. At times the bodies are used to actually mimic those of animals as in the example of a man impersonating a donkey which is carrying a person on its back. Contributing to this suggestion of the animal world, is the loose clothing which was worn and which lent itself easily to the appearance of swollen bodies, hunchbacks, puffed-up plumage or extended wings which effectively disfigured and hid the human figure in an enigmatically unrecognizable shape. These drawings transmit very clearly the freakish and macabre sense of the grotesque that marked the performances of the commedia dell'arte.

Similar disfigurations can be found in the avant-garde theatre and most obviously in Ubu Roi which uses grotesque masks and in which characters are dressed in outlandish costumes that disguise the human body. In the first production of the play in 1896, the characters wore masks in the tradition of the character types so that, in Jarry's words, the "eternal nature of the character is embodied in the mask."[3] Here it is significant to recall Jarry's statement that le Père Hubert, on which Ubu was initially modelled, embodied for his students "tout le grotesque qui est au monde."[4] Physically, Ubu is even more grotesque than the commedia dell'arte characters. His physiognomy is that of a misshapen, rotund creature, with a pear-shaped head, practically no hair and a flabby stomach. In the illustrations that accompany the text of Ubu Roi the three main characters, Père Ubu, Mère Ubu and Captain Bordure are depicted as physically very disfigured; Père and Mère Ubu most often have countenances

that resemble those of pigs and their bodies are in shapes not recognizably human. Bordure resembles a tin soldier more than any human person or animal. From Jarry's specifications that appear in a letter in which he offers his work to M. Lugne-Poe, one can easily ascertain his intent to use the grotesque generously in his play. Here, I have excerpted some of the more relevant specifications that he made in the same letter:

> 1) Mask for the chief character.
> 2) A cardboard horse's head which he would hang from his neck, as they did in the Old English theatre, for the only two equestrian scenes, all of whose details are in the spirit of the play, as I intended to make a 'guignol' [a Punch-and-Judy show].
> 3) The costumes should give as little as possible the impression of local colour or chronology (this renders better the idea of something eternal). They should preferably be modern, as the satire is modern; and sordid, to make the play appear more wretched or horrific.[5]

In speaking of his characters, Jarry reinforces the idea that the grotesque distorts human beings by making them resemble animals and in so doing, he strips bare the facades that commonly obscure human vices. He writes:

> I intended that when the curtain went up the scene should confront the public like the exaggerating mirror in the stories of Madame Leprince de Beaumont, in which the depraved saw themselves with dragons' bodies, or bulls' horns, or whatever corresponded to their particular vice.[6]

In addition to their grotesque appearance, the characters in Ubu Roi are also invested with numerous attributes that point to their grotesqueness. These are gluttony, extreme stupidity, avarice, coarseness and foolishness.

In Beckett, a similar inclination toward physical distortion is discernible, although it is in subtler tones and it is portrayed differently. In Waiting for Godot, one finds neither masks nor elaborate costumes that disfigure the human body. Instead, one is confronted with two tramps who are ill-mannered, poorly dressed and who wear bowler hats. The distortion

in this play is more apparent in the physical movements of the characters and in their bestial actions. None of the characters in Waiting for Godot are very steady on their feet. They are continuously falling to the ground, unable to maintain their upright position and often incapable of returning to their feet without aid once they have fallen. This suggests a certain primitive, animal-like state that approximates a primordial condition. This is characterized by such actions as: Estragon pulling at his toes; gnawing at left-over bones; sucking on carrots and turnips; Lucky kicking Estragon violently like a beast; panting and groaning; Pozzo beating the ground with his fists. In connection with this fallen condition it is significant to look at the stance that is described in the following passage. Is this a description of human beings or apes? "They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees."[7] From this description, one can't help conjuring up images of monkeys as one sees them at a zoo, staring ungraciously out of their cages, or dangling from a tree branch, unaware, unconcerned and unconscious. In this play the difference between the human being and the animal is reduced so that the two are placed in the same camp, in the same playground; the gap between the two is bridged.

The grotesque is not restricted to the physical; it is also communicated in the form of horror usually linked with themes such as dreams, madness, the invocation of the mechanical or the puppet world or through a closed world such as the jungle or the unknown. In the commedia dell'arte the horror results from the mechanical manifestations of the characters. In the action of the commedia dell'arte there is a level of horror which is associated with the tangles and duels between the characters, the beatings

imposed on the servants, the appearance of spirits, the near-deaths, the feignings of death during which the character is actually laid in a coffin. Also, if one accepts Kayser's idea[8] that in the modern period, much of the grotesque springs from the estrangement of the self, then in the commedia dell'arte, one finds very common manifestations of this theme in the version of the double and the automaton. In much the same way as in the avant-garde theatre, the individual is seen as a puppet in the hands of fate. Consequently it gives rise to a lot of cynicism, caricature and mockery.

According to W. Kayser, whose enlightening work on the grotesque has clearly outlined the trends of this movement, the grotesque is a state between laughter and terror. If one takes this as a testing module for the two theatres here studied, it is necessary to admit that the commedia dell'arte operates closer to the laughter side of the grotesque while the avant-garde theatre leans strongly towards the side of terror. If the avant-garde seems less grotesque on a physically visible level, it certainly contains a heightened sense of horror that is associated with the psychological and that operates on a suggestive and intangible level. The main device on which this operates is the transformation of a world which is no longer reliable and recognizable. In the absurd worlds created by Jarry, Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco and Pirandello, there is the topsy-turvy feeling, but unlike the occurrence that is found in the fantastic which elicits wonder, this one elicits horror and fright, because that which is familiar has become inexplicable. Appropriately in Ionesco's Rhinoceros, an entire town's population turns into rhinoceroses with the exception of one individual who remains bewildered and frightened at the overwhelming and total

transformation of the townsfolk. Once a part of the fabric of the town, he is now isolated and estranged and no longer able to understand the principles upon which the town functions. In essence, it is a world gone mad. Similar to Rhinoceros, Ubu Roi elicits horror which is not so much tied to the unknown as it is personified in the tyrannous and savage character of Ubu. In this sense, it too represents a world that has gone mad and one in which an imbecile like Ubu is capable of ruling a country by ruining people's lives and committing atrocious acts of violence to satisfy his whims. In the avant-garde, the familiar becomes strange because the characters behave against all our expectations; identities dissolve in front of our very eyes; innocent and familiar actions turn to perils; the commonly accepted is twisted into riddles. To invoke fear of the unknown is another common method of the grotesque. In Beckett's play, Godot is neither defined nor established as a specific identity. Maybe he only exists in the minds of the two characters? As a result of this unexplained reference there is a constant anxiety that accompanies the mention of his name. It is not certain whether or not Godot will come, when he will come and whether he is a benevolent or an evil force. The characters cannot even be certain that they have been seen by Godot's messenger. Vladimir, searching for reassurance of his existence, asks anxiously, "You did see us, didn't you?" and later, he repeats the same uncertainty, "You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me!"[9]

A sense of horror is continued in the setting. Significantly in Waiting for Godot, the setting is that of a bog, a symbol that is immediately associated with fear; one conjures up images of being swallowed

up by it. Also the sound of the word itself is suggestive of horror because it is close to the word 'bogy' meaning an evil form. At any rate, one senses the hostility of this environment through varied illusions and allusions. One of them is the fact that Estragon is beaten regularly by a mysterious 'they' whose identity is not revealed. Lucky's appearance in the form of a dog is also a disquieting image. One shudders at seeing a human being who is tied by a rope around his neck and who repulsively pants and slobbers.[10]

Pinter also plays with the unknowable in his works. What is it that Davies in The Caretaker fears? Why is he suspicious of the people next door? Why is he afraid to answer the door as a caretaker? Why is he afraid of disclosing his real identity? Who is after him? All these questions remain elusively unanswered; he is rejected because he "makes too much noise" - that is the riddle that the spectator has to untangle. The play becomes filled with an ominous tension resulting from a source that the viewer cannot realize, cannot perceive and cannot articulate. Pinter's plays are often closed worlds in which the impending presence of the outside world is threatening. They are airless rooms marked by an atmosphere of suffocation. In The Caretaker, as in the other plays, there is the suggestion that outside it is dark night and that these neighbourhoods are seedy, violent places. Davies speaks of having been frequently beaten; he is afraid of the wind and the rain which might penetrate through the open window. Violence is always nearby and Pinter's characters try unsuccessfully to seal themselves off from the outside. For Aston, there is yet another peril, that of the scary world of the asylum. In The Birthday Party, Stanley never goes out, but the menace that he fears can-

not be kept out and it appears in the shape of McCann and Goldberg. These two figures come to torment Stanley, interrogating him on his past, taking away his glasses thereby depriving him of his sight, turning out the lights and shining a torch in his face and finally pushing him into the abyss of madness. McCann and Goldberg are also the incarnations of some of the internal demons that Stanley is fighting with and therefore they are figures also associated with that which cannot be defined. Their presence in the play is never clearly explained and neither is their mission but Stanley seems to know about their arrival in advance. Hence to the spectator it is never made clear whether they are real or whether they are products of Stanley's anxiety and guilt. Seen in this light they are truly terrifying because they produce psychological tension and horror.

The grotesque can provoke laughter but it can also communicate terror. It is this dichotomy that is at work in both theatres. Operating on a similar balance is another common ingredient, that of satire. But satire elicits not fear alongside of laughter but criticism instead. Its role is to criticize, to cut and often to leave a bitter aftertaste in our mouths while we laugh. Its role is to "censure wickedness and folly."[11]

Satire

Satire is defined by Leonard Feinberg as a "playfully critical distortion of the familiar"[12] and its aim, according to Horace, is to "tell the truth, laughing."[13] This definition demonstrates that satire, like the grotesque, depends on the interplay between two opposing states; the comic and the tragic. In the Italian comedies the satire is less trenchant than it is in the avant-garde theatre; this is because these comedies generally end in a conciliatory mood and because their scorn is

directed more toward folly than wickedness; hence it is more playful than serious. The avant-garde theatre, on the other hand, at times seems to be more tragic than satiric, but this is because of the weightiness of the subject of scorn. Highet states that the author of a satire may use any of the following weapons: "irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anti-climax, topicality, obscenity, violence, vividness and exaggeration."[14] These ingredients may be considered valid indicators of satiric content. There are also other reliable tests for satire such as one, the intent to shock the audience from its complacence, and two, the typical emotion that the author wishes to evoke which is a blend of amusement and contempt. Furthermore, satire tends to be concerned with society rather than with the individual, with the typical rather than the unique.

The two theatres here studied generously use the elements which Highet associates with satire and both types of plays are a mixture of mockery and censorship. They can be seen as layers of criticism embedded in comedy, for it is accepted that satire must have a censuring or condemning spirit. That which is satiric in these works is presented in the image of the grimace that shows the pain of the human condition, for in both cases the metaphor of a 'time-out-of-joint' can be applied.

Firstly and most obviously satirical in the commedia dell'arte are the masks which jeer at certain professions and certain social attitudes and circumstances, as has been discussed in Chapter I. Parody is one of the most useful tools of satire. It is easy to recognize or recall a myriad of instances in which the mannerisms, the speech patterns and the concerns of certain social classes are parodied in the Italian comedies. Essentially in the commedia dell'arte the satire is directed toward the

eccentricities and faults of the various social and professional classes. By disclosing and magnifying the foibles of the old men types who are in the position of power, it condemns their weaknesses and vices. Pantalone, for instance, is ridiculed for his avarice and his foolishness. He is exaggeratedly shown as an absent-minded idiot whose ability to maintain control is non-existent. In a way, this method of criticism is a kind of social corrective measure. Pantalone's love affairs are satiric in the sense that they disclose a less honourable and noble side of this esteemed class of respectable merchants. What is meant by satire here is an overall sense of criticism that can be derived from the way the material is presented. The faults that are condemned in the commedia dell'arte range from minor character flaws to serious social problems. The tyrannic nature of the masters over their servants is one of the more serious issues of the 'commedia.' The expectation of the masters to have the servants work incessantly to achieve the foolish needs of their superiors is grossly exaggerated, thereby exposing the injustice of the situation. By satirizing the differences between the ruling class and their servers, the commedia divulges the ills of its society and its double standard attitude in justifying physical abuse of servants for minor errors while tolerating promiscuity and excessive indulgences in the masters, and above all demonstrating the hypocrisy of those in power. On the other side of the coin, the servants are shown also as excessively foolish but at the same time as using their shrewdness and cunning as survival mechanisms. They are represented as capable of robbing their masters blind under their very noses and as frequently outwitting the old men for the sake of their own protection. The parody is sometimes apparent in the frequent travesties that can be documented. Women dressed as men are able to discover the irrational motives

of their lovers and sometimes their fickle nature. Likewise servants disguised as their masters tend to disclose qualities that are otherwise kept well hidden. Recalling Highet's criteria of satire, it is noteworthy that commedia dell'arte uses many of the techniques that he mentions. For it is full of colloquialisms, obscenity, violence and exaggeration. I imagine performances of the commedia dell'arte were shocking in many ways especially at the beginning of its development. Its frank and vivid language and its grotesque characters would have been shocking to audiences accustomed to a theatre that respected the rules of decorum. As any good satire is apt to do, the commedia dell'arte concentrates on the general, attacking various conditions rather than concerning itself with the problems of the individual.

Similarly avant-garde theatre is shocking in its intent and definitely in its reception. In this century, it is difficult to think of any other theatre which has so persistently enraged, shocked and perplexed the public. Its obscene and nonsensical language, its tendency toward very graphic and cruel violence on stage, its bleak outlook on humankind, its stripped and barren landscapes, are all indicators of shock mechanisms used by the authors of the Absurd to jolt the audience from its complacency and to show the horrors that lie beneath the seemingly normal and harmless events of everyday life.

Parody is another large component of the Absurdist plays. In Ubu Roi for instance, Shakespearian literary themes are parodied; the play mimicks the high tragedies by using the same themes but in a ridiculous context. Macbeth is the major play that Jarry takes as his model for parody. Ubu, prodded by Mère Ubu who comically echoes Lady Macbeth's insatiable hunger

for power, deposes the existing monarch. (Note also the parallels in the names of the two pairs: Père Ubu and Mère Ubu; Macbeth and Lady Macbeth). What follows is a bloodbath by a man who is incapable of controlling his urge for power. Ubu, like Macbeth, becomes a horrid power monger who turns his court into a slaughterhouse. The comical turn in Jarry's plot is achieved by reducing Ubu's motives for gaining power to a base and ludicrous level. These reasons are that he wants a nice cloak; he wants to eat and drink to saturation and simply, he wants to be able to sit on the throne. As a result the play succeeds in demystifying the heroic nature that is normally attached to rulers and it exposes their sometimes ignoble nature. It reduces the actions of human beings to a very anti-heroic level, namely to that of rogues and rascals. Continuing with the Shakespearian parallel, both Mère Ubu and Père Ubu are haunted by their crimes, as were the Macbeth-Lady Macbeth pair. In Act IV, Scene i, Mère Ubu is at the site of the crypt of the former Kings of Poland, where she is looking for gold. She gets frightened and hears a voice speaking to her from one of the tombs. The words that she utters in such a lofty manner are so incongruous with her contemptible personality that they provoke laughter. At the same time, they are echoes of Macbeth's guilt-ridden conscience; he too hears voices after he has committed the murder of the King. The passage is worth quoting for the sake of seeing the striking similarity in the language used. These are Mère Ubu's words:

> Eh! quel est ce bruit? Dans ces vieilles voûtes y aurait-il encore des vivants? Non, ce n'est rien, hâtons-nous. Prenons tout. Cet argent sera mieux à la face du jour qu'au milieu des tombeaux des anciens princes. Remettons la pierre. Eh quoi! toujours ce bruit. Ma presence en ces lieux me cause une étrange frayeur. Je prendrai le reste de cet or une autre fois, je reviendrai demain.[15]

For the purpose of comparison, here is the passage of Macbeth's words which he utters and which communicate his fear and torment:

> Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!' ... Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' ... Whence is that knocking?[16]

Similarly, Père Ubu is haunted by an apparition in his sleep.[17] In the vein of the absurd, however, it is in the shape of a bear. Another Shakespearian theme that is mocked by Jarry is the conspiracy to kill the King, which is resonant of the conspiracy to kill Julius Caesar in the tragedy by that name. The Queen's premonition that Père Ubu would rise against the King is strikingly similar to Caesar's wife, Calphurnia's dream upon which she based the plea to Caesar not to go to the Senate that day. Both men go forth to prove their valor; they do not heed their wives' urgings. Both are slain as predicted. Yet another Shakespearian character is recreated in the young Bougrelas who, like Hamlet, is left to avenge the murder of his father, the King. To this young man, a ghost appears who identifies himself as one of Bougrelas' ancestors and who assigns him the task of vindicating the wrongs that have been done to the family.

These parodies coupled with the vulgarisms, the obscenities, the exaggeration and all the violence that can be found in the play, constitute a clear picture of the play's satiric edge, for it shocks as well as arouses laughter and, at the same time, it elicits contempt at the horrors embodied in Ubu, at his stupidity and at the system of power that has, for so long, allowed the likes of Ubu to rule and commit their horrible crimes against humanity without any retribution. It operates as a criticism on many levels, that of the theatre, that of canonic literature, that of social complacency, that of social structures and that of the hierarchy of power. In Ionesco's play Rhinoceros, there is a similar satiric structure in that the play deals

with the horrors of social changes. There is in this play, an impending horror of the threat of a force capable of overthrowing everyone's life. The elements of the rhinoceros in human beings become warning signals. The overall situation of human beings who are swept by a wave of rhinoceritis becomes a metaphor for the horrors that suddenly overtake our worlds without any warning and when we are least prepared. The play can be seen in allegorical terms, criticising those who think that they are well equipped to recognize and repel the forces of evil but who are in fact easily and blindly converted to the most horrible doctrines that arise and become popular.

Waiting for Godot fulfills the basic requirement of satire in that it concerns itself with the general and not the particular. In this work, there is virtually no psychological development of the characters. The overall concern is with a situation, that of our existence, and not with the individual's problems. There is another measure of satire in Lucky's speech which satirizes the inadequateness of philosophical jargon along with the numerous 'professional' languages that have sprung up in our age of specialization. He does this by reciting a seemingly nonsensical tirade which is incomprehensible except under careful scrutiny which is, of course, an impossible task for the audience at the time of reception. Pozzo, who represents a man of power, parodies the silly preoccupation of this class of men and that level of self-importance and patronizing attitude that distinguishes their position. Pozzo speaks in an affected pseudo-philosophical manner, attaching great importance to such trifles as his smoking habits, the weather and social formalities. He is ridiculed as a man who gives himself airs. Resembling the affected attitude of the 'super-star' and seeking praise, he asks, "How did you find me? Good?

Fair? Middling? Poor? Positively Bad?"[18] In this same vein he behaves in a condescending fashion toward Vladimir and Estragon, whom he has just met. He insults them by saying that he likes human company even when that company is not up to his standards. Continuing in this vein, Pozzo ungraciously thanks them for their kindness in a ridiculous and pompous manner. He says, "Gentlemen, you have been ... civil to me."[19]

Disclosing all these traits really points to the absurdity of such people in our society and also provokes a sense of scorn at such heightened silliness. Like any satiric writing it works as a warning, a kind of cautionary remark on the dangers of leaving such tendencies to run rampant. In a general way, the play mocks the idea of salvation itself. By having two tramps occupying their time with waiting on a muck heap for a miraculous intervention in their dull and tedious lives, it ridicules the widespread notion that our earthly existence, no matter how dull, can be justified by the promise of future salvation and our readiness to accept such notions. It points to the weaknesses in human beings in refusing to accept reality as it is and instead, placing our hopes 'upon the stars' rather than in our own capabilities. It shows the absurdity of an existence that is based on the notion of 'passing the time.' Ridicule of social conventions also appears in Ionesco's work, La cantatrice chauve (The Bald Soprano), in which there is a general sense of scorn and mockery of bourgeois values and morality and of the hypocrisy that these are based on. It points out the inane and senseless existence of those who merely 'pass the time' by telling stories especially inconsequential ones which have neither force nor meaning. Along with the mockery and the ridicule there is the dimension of pain that makes up the other side of the satire. One senses very

acutely the anguish of the tramps in Waiting for Godot and the pain they experience in their waiting, in their fears, in their relationship, in their physical torment and in the general indifference of their world. This can be understood as cosmic irony, because regardless of all their efforts, Vladimir and Estragon's universe remains indifferent to their pains, their concerns and their anguish. The play also makes some poignant satirical comments on the conventions of the theatre. The following speech can be interpreted as a comment on the theatre. Satire makes great literary criticism.

> Charming evening we're having.
> Unforgettable.
> And it's not over.
> Apparently not.
> It's only beginning.
> It's awful.
> Worse than the pantomime.
> The circus.
> The music-hall.
> The circus.[20]

If these lines are read as remarks overheard at the theatre and as criticisms of Beckett's own work, they become comments that turn inward upon the work itself. This conversation can also be read as a parody of the speech of the theatre-goer who insists on serious and respectable works being represented. Therefore, they disparage those works that belong to light entertainment, such as the pantomime, the music-hall and the circus. In addition, Pozzo's recitation and Lucky's performance can be viewed as comments on parts of plays such as the dance, the recital and other entertainment components. In general it scoffs at the acting profession itself. Pirandello attacks this area with passionate force. In Questa sera the actors and actresses are presented as a petty, silly, egotistical and quarrelsome lot, all of whom wish to impose their personal interpretation on the work.

Pirandello is also fond of baring theatrical conventions and in this work he exposes the arbitrariness of such conventions as sequencing, the intermission and the fulfillment of audience expectations in general.

Pinter's works also demonstrate a satiric treatment of the issues that are tied to our social and psychological existence. His most obvious satiric weapon is his ability to create characters towards whom one feels simultaneous contempt and amusement. On the Pinter stage, one's existence is being satirized through the inconsistent beings that inhabit it. One's thoughts and one's fears are all laid on stage so that one participates with the psychological anxiety that these characters represent. The spectator is left with the realization that a world seemingly normal and ordinary on the surface is full of absurdities and inconsistencies underneath. The Pinter stage is also characterized by anti-climax because largely on the surface nothing happens. The stage is set for the action but the greater portion of the events are internalized and therefore they are not seen but rather they are felt. Exaggeration of the inanity of dialogue, the inconsequential nature of communication, the paradox of the family as a unit that is based on violence are all parts of the satiric edge that one senses at a Pinter performance. The Caretaker makes fun of and criticizes an age of increased consumerism. Both brothers in this play are obsessed with the accumulation of material things, which may one day be useful or valuable. This accumulation is referred to as 'junk,' and it is exaggerated to the point that Aston lives in a room cluttered with objects that he collects, but which have no particular function. In the room there is a varied assortment of useless items such as a shopping cart, many boxes, a lawn-mower, a gas stove, a statue of Buddha, a clothes

horse, and the list goes on for some time. This demonstrates Aston's mania for collecting things. The other brother, Mick is also concerned with consumerism. His topical speech about re-decorating illustrates this concern with objects. Reading it, one senses the critical biting view of an age that has placed so much importance on materialism:

> I'd have ... I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares. I'd have those colours re-echoed in the walls. I'd offset the kitchen units with charcoal-grey worktops. Plenty of room for cupboards for the crockery. We'd have a small wall cupboard, a large wall cupboard, a corner wall cupboard with revolving shelves. You wouldn't be short of cupboards. You could put the dining room across the landing, see? Yes. Venetian blinds on the window, cork floor, cork tiles. You could have an off-white pile linen rug, a table in ... in afromosia teak veneer, sideboard with matt black drawers, curved chairs with cushioned seats, armchairs in oatmeal tweed, a beech frame settee with a woven seagrass seat, white-topped heat-resistant coffee table, white tile surround. Yes. Then the bedroom. What's a bedroom? It's a retreat. It's a place to go for rest and peace. So you want quiet decoration. The lighting functional. Furniture ... mahogany and rosewood. Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains, a bedspread with a pattern of small blue roses on a white ground, dressing-table with a lift-up top containing a plastic tray, table lamp of white raffia .. (Mick sits up) it wouldn't be a flat it'd be a palace.[21]

As these examples show, satire plays an important role in both the Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre. Satire in both cases hinges on the fact that it makes fun of things with a biting and critical edge to it, and also that these two theatres concern themselves with mockery and criticism of social and philosophical issues rather than with specific individuals. Therefore, the balance that was seen in the grotesque continues to be a major concern in the component of satire, and as it will be demonstrated in the next section, this same equilibrium plays an important part in farce which blends in careful proportions the spirit of hysteria with that of violence and cruelty.

Farce - Part I

A third and, I believe, very central parallel between the two types of theatres discussed is a tendency to use farcical elements to achieve humour. Farce is defined as "an extreme form of comedy in which laughter is raised at the expense of probability, particularly by horse-play and bodily assault, and "its subject is the inherent stupidity of man at odds with his environment."[22] Farce is typically full of surprises, often portraying a world that has gone mad or one that is founded on a fantasy. It pertains mainly to the humour of the senses, often displaying physical bodies which appear to be indestructible. The spectator laughs at human beings performing exaggerated physical manoeuvers which seem quite improbable. Of course, rationally one knows that the actors' abilities are dependent upon the artifice of the acrobat, the juggler and the histrion, or, in film, on trick photography. Nevertheless, the artistry is usually concealed from the audience and what the viewer is apt to see is merely the improbable physical feat. An important writer on the subject of farce, Eric Bentley, makes this point clearly in his essay, entitled simply "Farce" which appears in his book The Life of Drama. He writes:

> The theatre of farce is the theatre of the human body but of that body in a state as far from the natural as the voice of Chaliapin is from my voice or yours. It is a theatre in which, though the marionettes are men, the men are super-marionettes. It is the theatre of the surrealist body.[23]

From this one can understand the disengagement that is commonly felt with the characters that appear in this theatre. The world which they inhabit is one which resembles ours but, unlike our world, it is one in which anything is possible. It is full of surprises, transformations, quick changes of heart and costume and it is filled with a general feeling of hysteria

and wildness. The word 'farce' comes from the French 'farci' or 'farcie' and ultimately is derived from the Latin 'farsa' or 'stuffed.' Metaphorically this means that farce will accomodate distinctive kinds of content, from snappy cross-talk to gymnastics or mime. In other words, it is not so much an independent genre as a tone, a device, or a part of content. It does not exist independently from comedy, satire, burlesque or parody. It is more likely to co-exist as a member of this larger family. The playwright simply 'stuffs' these elements into the work. To recapitulate briefly, then, farcical moments are likely to be characterized by high improbability, exaggerated practical joking, numerous coincidences and absurdities, rustic humour, obscene jest and elaborate physical feats. Farce is also commonly associated with portraying a profusion of violence, action which is reduced to gesture and a 'turning-of-the-tables' or inversion technique. These aspects do not, I must emphasize, belong to farce uniquely; many of them can be found in other types of comedy, especially frequently in the world of the clown, of slapstick, vaudeville and the circus. This is perhaps because "farce, lacking a form of its own, borrows the shape of its material."[24]

For this reason it is very difficult to isolate the farcical moment from other types of comical moments. This difficulty is commonly encountered in critical works written on the subject. At this point, then, it is appropriate to examine at least one attempt at distinction between farce and other genres. This is made by Albert Bermel in his book, Farce. His definition is as follows:

> ... farce is more bitter, more cruel, more downright unfair [than comedy.] The dislike that farce arouses has stronger components of violence and contempt. Therefore, it more tellingly reflects and echoes the corruption, treachery, hypocrisy, brutality and injustices of life. Or not so much reflects and echoes as refracts and distorts. For farce

> doesn't try to reproduce life; it selects, manipulates, exaggerates.

He adds:

> To some writers farce appears needlessly irrational; yet farce's irrationalities cannot begin to match those of life. But they can make us laugh, and if they don't, they're not farcical; farce and laughter are inseparable. In some farces laughter sweetens the pill; in others the pill is entirely sugar, or maybe saccharin.[25]

To repeat, farce is a very elusive quality, difficult to pin down, but which has nevertheless common distinguishing characteristics, many of them inherited from very old traditions. It is an ancient form of merrymaking, often clad in a festive or revelling spirit. It acquires its nature from its ancestors in the festivals such as the Feast of Fools, the Dyonisian festivals and the carnival and therefore, it is strongly tied to folklore and folk drama. Its roots lie in the custom of scoffing at the habits of one's neighbours and this has remained as one of its important salient features. Throughout the ages, it has remained a negating force. It is a form of derision, laughing at human weaknesses and irrationalities; humiliating or humbling by scoffing at habits, customs, eccentricities, affectations and pretensions. However, the joke is on all of us as a human race since farce does not necessarily isolate one person, as for example does invective. By laughing at others and their world, we also laugh at ourselves and the conditions of our world.

At this point one may be tempted to ask 'what is so pleasurable in laughing at our own human weaknesses or those of our neighbours?' Again the distance between ourselves and the characters is the answer. One laughs mainly because the characters remain stock types, representatives of groups and professions or spokesmen of certain beliefs and ideas. We, the spec-

tators, are then able to remain more or less detached from these characters, we do not engage with them, because, although they are human, they often lack the psychological development that is required if we are to identify or empathize with a character. Here, if one recalls Bergson's words, this detachment qualifies one of his key requirements for laughter, "the abscence of feeling," for he maintains that "laughter has no greater foe than emotion."[26]

As stated earlier, farce depends greatly on the physical world for its laughter. It is the enactment of the practical joke which carries out the farce. In fact, this is one of the large components of farce and it encompasses acts based on clowning, acrobatics, mechanicals, physical beatings and loud noises. These kinds of actions frequently reflect a world that has gone topsy-turvy so that farce is often found operating in an unsteady environment. It uses many stage entrances and exits, trapdoors, secret doors and passageways and it often speeds up its tempo to separate its audience even further from the 'foreign' human behaviour that is witnessed on the stage.

What, then, is the purpose of creating a world that has been turned upside down? Referring back to Bermel's distinction, the purpose is connected mainly with the 'overturning of decorum.' It provides a release from the constrictions of everyday behaviour, as did the festivals and revels in ancient times. That is why in farces one often finds situations such as trances, spells, inebriation and travesty. In the same vein, it also uses the device of inversion to upset the normal. This occurs mostly in the reversal of roles so that the fool becomes the wise man; the thief and honest man switch places as do the prisoner and the gaoler, the robber

and the robbed. Jessica Milner Davis, in her small book on farce, states that "at its heart is the eternal comic conflict between the forces of conventional authority and the forces of rebellion."[27] In farce, the rebellious side of us revels in seeing the underdog in a position of power; we take pleasure in seeing the barriers of our world momentarily torn down and social taboos being violated. But to ensure that farce does not turn to tragedy, a strict balance between aggression and play must be maintained. If the 'playfulness' of farce is checked and not allowed to become vehemence or aggression, it "permits an indulgent regression to the joys and terrors of nonsense."[28] This may be part of the reason why we laugh at two people who are speaking to each other but who are not communicating. Their speech is reduced to nonsense which resembles the speech of children. Hence, the child's world has been recreated. Eric Bentley views this regression and upsetting of normality in Freudian terms. He believes that there is a therapeutic dimension in farce, because it is a wish fulfillment which allows the spectator to fulfill his repressed wishes. He posits: "In farce as in dreams, one is permitted the outrage but is spared the consequence."[29] This is probably what Bergson meant in his statement that the function of laughter is to intimidate by humiliation and that "even in the best of men there exists a spark of spitefulness and mischief."[30] Farce does depict human beings in their least flattering moments. It shows what is beneath all the dignity by portraying them as crude, rough, raw, violent, barbaric and mischievous pranksters. The interplay between aggression and play can point, as it often does, to our general helplessness. By portraying us as indulging in our natural impulses, it also shows us the tyranny of these same impulses so that the epiphanic moment

of a farce is one which causes a 'full roar of laughter tinged with the recognition of a common humanity.' Our helplessness is brought to light in "the mechanical demands of the body, the mechanical patterns of habit, and the universal laws of mechanics themselves."[31]

In the Absurdist Theatre farce is mixed with tragedy and human pathos. Of course, ultimately in this theatre, there is not a reconciliation, so that the lasting effect is a disturbing one. The practical joke is simply that of our existence and our common helplessness to alter our state along with all the games we play. Bergson claims that all comedy is game; appropriately in the Theatre of the Absurd, one finds plenty of games, but the games do not change the situation, they merely pass the time. This is because farce operates in extreme contrasts so that everyday drabness is filled with extreme fantasies. In a sense it presents human beings as they are trapped in the cage of society which determines their behaviour, but it also exposes their wishes that lie beneath the masks of their conventionality.

Let us look firstly at the tendency toward exaggeration that is a primary device of farce. In commedia dell'arte, which is essentially farce, the most obvious area of exaggeration is found in its elaborate plots. This type of comedy excells in its intrigues, complications, misunderstandings and in creating knot upon knot, all of which must be untied by the end of the play, because, unlike the avant-garde theatre, commedia dell'arte is essentially comedy and therefore must end in reconciliation at whatever cost. Without doubt, it scoffs at human weaknesses and irrationalities, carrying to extremes its cruel depictions of the characters and disclosing their brutal and avaricious natures. In the

fools it magnifies their appetites, their trickery and their trouble-maker nature. Likewise, in the sets of lovers one witnesses the irrationalities and game-playing that make up a large part of courtship. There is no need here to describe in detail what has already been analysed in the previous chapter. Suffice it to say, that the stock characters are used largely to ridicule some very human instincts and behaviour. There is also much evidence of the common role reversal in this type of comedy. The servants dress in their masters' clothes; sisters and brothers exchange costumes and positions; men and women trade their roles and genders so that the courted become the courtiers. Commedia dell'arte is full of travesties, many of which are executed quickly, creating a great feeling of confusion. The tempo is generally speeded up, resulting in many surprises, exits and entrances and often displaying 'close-calls' in which the tricksters are caught in their own game. In this sense, it is very much in the farcical tradition of causing uproarious laughter but often creating the turning of the tables so that Arlecchino gets caught at his shrewd manipulations of events and gets a severe beating from his master. The servants get caught stealing from their masters' households or inventing and setting up complicated traps for them. All the commedia dell'arte characters are involved in some kind of game-playing, playing tricks on each other, and generally indulging in mischief making. Often they get caught in their own games and one sees them as pitiful and helpless individuals at the mercy of the mechanics of the world that they inhabit. Commedia dell'arte also presents a world that is distanced from the ordinary, everyday reality. First of all, magic potions, mandrakes, the working of devils and spirits are common occurrences. Secondly, the world

is painted as a surrealist machination of improbable and bizarre goings-on such as elaborate parties, festivals, summer vacations, duels and wars. Furthermore this stage is inhabited by such out-of-the-ordinary characters as necromancers, pirates, bandits, courtesans, slaves, charlatans, ruffians and villains. Another aspect of the improbabilities that take place in these comedies are the numerous coincidences, the most common of which is the reuniting of two siblings who had been separated at birth. Sold into slavery, or believed dead, one of the twins miraculously re-appears and the two are reunited. 'Deus ex machina' is at work to resolve the most tangled situation and to put right the most foul misdeed.

Looking at the physical world that is common to farce, it is difficult to deny the commedia's accomplishment in this area. It gained widespread appeal throughout Europe because of the marvellous skills of its actors as performers of incredible physical feats. Just as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton performed super-human feats in the movies, these clowns 'carried-on' in a hurried pace, scurrying here and there, carrying corpses, hiding illicit lovers, flinging bodies as if they were weightless matter, juggling and tossing things all about them. The tray trick is a common example. Arlecchino is carrying a tray full of glasses; he is distracted and careless, so he bumps into someone and trips, nearly upsetting all the glasses but, by a slight manipulation, he restores his balance and recovers the tray just at the crucial moment. All hold their breath for a moment. This manipulation of the physical world also contributes to the feeling of instability which is created in the commedia dell'arte. A heightened sense of this is created especially when the scenes present two opposing situations for which the audience is in the privileged position

of knowing the facts of both situations. A typical example of this type of scene is one in which a corpse, an impostor or an illicit lover has just been hidden through one of the trapdoors. Precisely at that moment the wrong person walks through the door. The newcomer does not suspect anything because nothing is noticeable but the audience knows that the person is being deceived and consequently can share a laugh or a moment of satisfaction at seeing someone duped in such a way.

In the avant-garde theatre, the instances of farce are many and multifarious. They range from the hyperbolic, farcical incidents which pervade Ubu Roi, to Pinter's subtle use of the farcical in gesture and language.

Ubu Roi is classified as a monstrous farce. It is primarily physical, not in the skills demonstrated by the actors but in its focus on the physical action. It lays great importance on physical needs and desires; it stresses physical activity and the entire play is permeated with both verbal and physical violence of an excessive kind. Ubu Roi is a gross exaggeration in all aspects; in its caricatures, in the absurdities that it engages in and in the eccentric language used by Père Ubu. Firstly in the tradition of farce, Jarry shows human beings in their crudest and basest light. Ubu is depicted as the most vulgar individual imaginable. He is extravagantly indulgent in satisfying his needs and wants. He has a gluttonous appetite for food and drink which is equalled only by his hunger for power and gold. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ubu is also physically loathsome. Mère Ubu is just as odious in her character as well as in her physical appearance. In encouraging Ubu to seize the throne, she offers the following reasons for wanting the position of King.

> A ta place, ce cul, je voudrais l'installer sur un trône. Tu pourrais augmenter indéfiniment tes richesses, manger fort souvent de l'andouille et rouler carrosse par les rues.[32]

She steals gold from the King and generally plays tricks, cheating and indulging in pranks, all of which are the farcical characteristics of the play. The physical indulgence in this play is carried to an extreme; it reaches its climax with Ubu's usurping of the throne. The revelling goes on for days, as is stated in the stage directions at the end of Act II:

> (Ils entrent dans le palais. On entend le bruit de l'orgie qui se prolonge jusq'au lendemain.)[33]

Here, the physicality, the crudeness and the trickery that belong to the farce are also a means of turning fear into jest. The fear of a barbaric power like Ubu is turned into sardonic humour. The play concentrates largely on physical action which is demonstrated by the numerous battles, and the frequent pitching, hurling and slinging of objects. This is the laughter mechanism of the farce. The chases that take place create the unstable environment that is common to the farce. It speeds things up, creating confusion which is coupled with the uproarious noise, and the breaking down of doors which is again a part of the improbable world of the farce. The absurdities are carried to an extreme, as in incidents in which Ubu is presented as hurling ribs at his guests and threatening to kill them with the ribs. The passage is quoted below; it demonstrates Ubu's ludicrousness and stupidity.

> Père Ubu: Comment, vous n'avez pas dîné! A la porte toute le monde! Restez, Bordure.
>
> (Personne ne bouge)
>
> Père Ubu; Vous n'êtes pas partis? De par ma chandelle verte, je vais vous assomer de côtes de rastron.
>
> (Il commence a en jeter)[34]

Likewise Ubu is shown in a ludicrous light when he holds a lavatory brush in his hand as a substitution for a King's sceptre. He throws this brush at his guests, who as a result, fall to the ground poisoned. By this outlandish behaviour an environment of havoc is created because the audience's references have been distorted and its expectations have not been fulfilled. That is, normally one expects a King to be of a noble nature, concerned with serious matters, and speaking in an elevated language. Instead, one is presented with a ludicrous specimen who speaks in the most vulgar tongue and whose behaviour resembles that of a rogue much more than that of King. The pratfall, another characteristic of the farce, is also frequently used in this play. The pratfall shows the base state that the individual has reached when that individual falls to the ground accidentally suddenly stripped of all dignity.

As is the case in many farces, the action of the play is reduced to gesture, especially in the sense that Jarry wanted the actors to carry placards explaining the action. Jarry's preference for gestural and exaggerated actions in the theatre is expressed in his essay, "Of the Futility of the 'Theatrical' in the Theatre," in which he writes:

> By slow nodding and lateral movements of his head the actor can displace the shadows over the whole surface of his mask. And experience has shown that the six main positions (and the same number in profile, though these are less clear), suffice for every expression. We shall not cite any examples, as they vary according to the nature of the mask, and because everyone who knows how to watch a puppet show will have been able to observe this for himself.
>
> They are simple expressions, and therefore universal. ... An example of universal gesture is the marionette displaying its bewilderment by starting back violently and hitting its head against a flat.[35]

Violence is another main feature of the farce and of this element Uhu Roi has plenty. The play is full of violent battles and words. Uhu's

threats are vicious. Here is a sampling of them which illustrates their brutal and savage nature:

> je te vais arracher les yeux.[36]

> Moi je commence: torsion du nez, arrachement des cheveux, pénétration du petit bout de bois dans les oreilles, extraction de la cervelle par les talons ...[37]

Violence is also found in the descriptions in the play. The description of the expulsion of the Nobles, for example, is full of torturous actions. Here are some of these descriptions:

> (Il le prend avec le crochet et le passe dans le trou)[38]

> (On Empile les Nobles dans la trappe)[39]

> (une lutte s'engage, la maison est détruite)[40]

It is extreme absurdity in which violence is framed which makes it comical; without that element, it would be very tragic. Similarly, the mischief that is found in the play is both comical and emphatically grave. In the instance of Mère Ubu playing the ghost, her prank is funny. She, like the clown or the fool, cannot resist taking advantage of the situation and here she plays to Père Ubu's weaknesses and vulnerability, posing as a 'supernatural apparition' and taking the opportunity to reprimand him on his behaviour toward his wife (herself) and, of course, to laud herself. But typical of the farcical device, the tables are turned and she is caught in her own game as the dawn breaks and it reveals her real identity and Ubu goes chasing after her threatening to retaliate on her joke. On the other hand, Père Ubu's mischief is of a graver kind, for he is shown to be an odious tyrant whose behaviour resembles that of a monster. The play shows the abominable nature of such a man. But the potential of horror is tempered by his foolishness, which diminishes its gravity. He

is immoderately caricatured and is described in very objectionable ways such as "an imbecile," "a swine," "a coward," "an armed pumpkin," "a fat baboon," "a revolutionary oaf," "a monster" and many others. His stupidity is extreme, as are his vanity and his ability to utter the simplest banalities in the most pompous fashion with an air of seriousness and authority. Here is the citation which exposes Ubu as the utter fool that he is:

> J'ai à vous recommander de mettre dans les fusils autant de balles qu'ils en pourront tenir, car 8 balles peuvent tuer 8 Russes et c'est autant que je n'aurair pas sur le dos.[41]

The play ends on a farcical note; Ubu's closing remark is the most exaggeratedly absurd and banal utterance that can be found in theatrical history. This is what he says:

> Ah! messieurs! si beau qu'il soit il ne vaut pas la Pologne, S'il n'y avait pas de Pologne, il n'y aurait pas de Polonais.[42]

From these examples it can be concluded that farce has a coarse and irreverent face and that is what surfaces most obviously in Ubu Roi. The play has a level of extreme hostility which awakens the dread and horror of tyranny. One is made aware of the danger of a personality like Ubu, but at the same time his stupidity, his vanity and indulgence are comical. Beneath the horror we can identify the clown in his tattered clothing performing his grossly exaggerated absurdities. Ubu, then, becomes distanced from us; he is transformed into a mechanical and inhuman character who is there to make us laugh and in laughing one senses the surrealist experience of the moment. Appropriately, at its premiere, the play elicited both responses, one of outrage and one of laughter, "It caused an uproar, it was violently booed and violently applauded"[43] writes Barbara Wright in the introduction to her translation of the play. What better proof could one have of the success that Jarry had in presenting his tragic farce?

In Waiting for Godot, the farcical is less apparent; it is somewhat obscured because it becomes trapped within the circus clown tradition; nevertheless, it is present and discernible at close range. I have established the presence of violence as one of the farcical elements. In Godot there is the violence in the mysterious beatings that Estragon receives in the night plus all the violence between Pozzo and Lucky. The universe presented by Beckett is crude; it is a world of tramps who sit on a 'heap' in the bog. They are concerned with their physical needs; they chew on carrots, turnips and chicken bones. In the farcical manner, Estragon is engrossed in putting on and taking off his boots and at one point he is depicted pulling at his toes in a primitive manner. In line with the farcical, this physical environment shows signs of instability. There are continuous pratfalls. Estragon particularly, has great difficulty in maintaining his upright stance, losing his balance on numerous occasions. The speeding up device that is prevalent in farces does not occur in this play except in moments of speedy exchange of dialogue during which short, choppy fragments of conversations are bounced back and forth between the two tramps.

The absurdities that become farcical in Waiting for Godot are found primarily in the tone of some of the conversations. For instance, the conversations contain nonsense which is framed by a serious tone. The audience, for example, interprets this scene as farcical. One of the characters exclaims, "This is becoming very insignificant."[44] The fact is that throughout the play they have engaged in a dialogue that on the surface seems like nothing more than meaningless dribble, so the proclamation that things are becoming insignificant is an exaggerated understatement.

Furthermore, the tasks that the two tramps perform to occupy their time are presented in a way that exaggerates the senselessness and lack of meaning that characterizes their existence but also it points to the silliness of attaching so much importance to these very trivial and largely insignificant tasks. In this play the mischief maker seems to lie outside of the work; it is something that strangely resembles fate. The joke seems to be that of a senseless existence spent trying to pass the time which is interminable, or waiting for an undefined figure of salvation who is so unreliable that he cannot keep his appointments. Again, his discrepancy between the comical treatment of the subject and the actual subject causes laughter in the farcical framework. Yet another discrepancy which contributes to the farcical mood can be cited, and that is the contrast between the everyday dullness that is presented, and the wild fantasies that are enacted through Lucky and Pozzo and the idea of Godot. Because these two situations occur simultaneously, they emphasize each other, each highlighting the other. Beckett's farcical elements are also very hostile because of the heavy tone of mockery that they carry. One example of this is the light-hearted and flippant way in which Vladimir and Estragon talk about suicide. This is shocking because, generally, the subject requires a grave and serious tone. Also the seriousness that is commonly attached to matters such as our existence and to our philosophical and religious beliefs, are here dismissed and scoffed at lightly. These are examples of the technique of inversion. That which is extremely serious is treated lightly and vice versa. What constitutes the farce in Waiting for Godot is the fact that it is a double-layered work. The tragic issues of the incoherent nature of our world, the mysterious beliefs in salvations, the

cruel and unresponsive attitude of the universe, the stasis of humanity at a level of darkness and hopelessness and our general helplessness are framed in the traditions of nonsense and clowning.

In Pinter's plays the farcical is somewhat obscured and less easy to identify, but it is there beneath the appearance of an ultra-realism. There is, for instance, the violence that is felt throughout the play. Admittedly, violence alone cannot constitute farce, but here, as in Beckett's work, it is mixed with a sort of comical playfulness that transforms it into farce. Pinter's plays are also full of contrasts, especially between tone and content; this gap separates and highlights each one. Insofar as the content of violence is concerned, one is immediately introduced to it at the beginning of The Caretaker, for example. Davies has been beaten up at a cafe in which he worked. He has been rescued by Aston who has kindly saved his life. As the play moves on, the violence continues to surface and by the end of Act I, with Mick's entrance, Davies is subjected to arm twists, flips to the floor and kicks until he becomes the butt of Mick's violent nature. Later on, in Act II, there is a typically farcical kind of violence in which Mick prevents Davies from getting his trousers. It's a cat-and-mouse game of taunting the victim and subjecting him to this practical joking which is, in essence cruel and humiliating and which eventually ends with Mick 'flicking' the trousers in Davies' face several times. The bag incident is another typically farcical moment. It is a particularly good example of the speech and counter speech pattern that is often found in farce. It also demonstrates the practical joking that goes on in all farces and it exposes the kind of violence that lies beneath these seemingly innocent and harmless pranks. Although Davies calls Mick a "bit of a joker," he is terrified by his antics. The bag incident

is here quoted in full:

Davies crosses back with the bag.
Mick rises and snatches it.

Mick. What's this?
Davies. Give us it, that's my bag!
Mick (warding him off). I've seen this bag before.
Davies. That's my bag!
Mick (eluding him). This bag's very familiar.
Davies. What do you mean?
Mick. Where'd you get it?
Aston (rising, to them). Scrub it.
Davies. That's mine.
Mick. Whose?
Davies. It's mine! Tell him it's mine!
Mick. This your bag?
Davies. Give me it!
Aston. Give it to him.
Mick. What? Give him what?
Davies. That bloody bag!
Mick (slipping it behind the gas stove). What bag? (to Davies.) What bag?
Davies (moving). Look here!
Mick (facing him). Where you going?
Davies. I'm goint to get ... my old ...
Mick. Watch your step, sonny! You're knocking at the door when no one's at home. Don't push it too hard. You come busting into a private house, laying your hands on anything you can lay your hands on. Don't overstep the mark son.

Aston picks up the bag

Davies. Your thieving bastard ... you thieving skate ... let me get my --
Aston. Here you are. (Aston offers the bag to Davies.)

Mick grabs it. Aston takes it.
Mick grabs it. Davies reaches for it.
Aston takes it. Mick reaches for it.
Aston gives it to Davies. Mick grabs it.
Pause.
Aston takes it. Davies takes it. Mick takes it. Davies reaches for it. Aston takes it.
Pause.
Aston gives it to Mick. Mick gives it to Davies.
Davies grasps it to him.
Pause.
Mick looks at Aston. Davies moves away with the bag.
He drops it.
Pause.

It is noticeable in this scene that the speech moves at a rapid rate, alternating quickly without pauses. The tit-for-tat structure of the joking also becomes apparent.

The repetitions that occur especially in the first Act of the play can be interpreted as farcical because they expose a certain kind of absent-mindedness and, to some extent, they point to some mischief making. Both Mick and Aston repeatedly ask Davies his name and although he replies to each inquiry, they immediately retaliate by asking the same question again. Mick also asks Davies a number of times whether he has slept in that room the night before and if he slept well. The repetition and the suggestion that, maybe the other person is not listening, is comical but it also recreates the situation of two people speaking to each other in two different languages. Furthermore, The Caretaker presents an image of man as a violent and unrefined creature; this is especially noticeable in the character of Davies, who is a tramp, dressed in tattered and torn clothing; he is dirty and foul-smelling; he is unshaven and he depends on begging for money, food and clothing. He demonstrates a kind of survival-in-the-jungle knowledge. He carries a knife for self-defense. Mick also has a violent and unpredictable character and Aston is given to fits of instability. The extreme fall from human dignity is into the abyss of the world of madness, which is what Aston recounts as his experience in a mental institution. This is in accordance with Bentley's belief that farce shows man "as hardly higher that the apes, as man in the mass, in the rough, in the raw, in anything but fine individual flower."[46] The farce element can also be found in the extreme contrast between tone and content in some of the conversations. One of the first examples of this in the play, is

Davies' lengthy speech on the subject of shoes. He expounds on the merits of good shoes, the difference between leather and suede and the importance of a good fit and on and on 'ad nauseum.' The obvious triviality of the matter and the exaggerated importance attached to it constitute the discrepancy that causes the farce. Also it resembles the nonsense talk of the commedia dell'arte; it demonstrates the fool's willingness to entertain at length the most obvious conclusions. A similar incident, but one which verges on absurdity and surrealism, is Aston's account of meeting a woman in a cafe and how she, 'out-of-the-blue,' propositioned him. This is farcical because it is exaggerated and improbable but more importantly, because of Davies' character and his willingness to stretch things, largely because he is a fool and he cannot resist playing games, especially if they seem to potentially improve his condition. At first he shows disbelief at the unusual event but he immediately shifts his reaction and begins to recount how similar things have happened to him repeatedly. In this light, Davies appears as somewhat of a prankster. He cannot resist playing the two brothers off against each other. Like any comic fool, he engages in this kind of mischief and troublemaking. Another farcical moment in the play is Davies' reaction to the lights going out. Firstly, this disrupts the order, creating confusion, and secondly, it exposes Davies' paranoiac nature which is made fun of. Mick, too suffers from being portrayed ridiculously. He is exposed as an opportunist who prides himself on his fashionable taste which in fact is exposed as being nothing but 'kitsch.' His small talk and his absurd decorating jargon are all ridiculed. Thus far, it has been established that the seemingly ordinary world of Harold Pinter's plays is a bizarre mechanism that is as complex as it is multi-layered and that one of these layers is the double image of vio-

lence-play of the farce.

In one of Pinter's earlier plays, The Birthday Party, the farcical is even more apparent, especially in the structure of the short, choppy conversations which create misunderstandings, or which, like the comedian's cross-talk, demonstrate that no real communication is taking place. The following conversation between Meg and Petey demonstrates the kind of everyday, trivial chatter that we all engage in, but because it is presented on a stage and we view it from a distance, its foolishness appears to be magnified.

> Meg. Is Stanley up yet?
> Petey. I don't know. Is he?
> Meg. I don't know. I haven't seen him down yet.
> Petey. Well then, he can't be up.
> Meg. Haven't you seen him down?
> Petey. I've only just come in.
> Meg. He must be still asleep.[47]

The conclusion that Meg arrives at, that 'he must be still asleep,' although it may reproduce quite accurately the common, everyday small-talk, sounds foolish and empty to the viewer. The viewer is left with the empty feeling of unfulfilled expectations because of the anti-climactic nature of this type of dialogue and hence, perceives these scenes as farcical and clownish routines. In the same play, in another conversation between two other characters, this same feeling is reiterated; while one character is speaking, the other one is whistling, a clown tradition which suggests that the actor removes himself from the scene and plays to the audience. There is also the incident in which a conversation is framed in the structure of an interrogation, but the subject of the interrogation gradually degenerates into what appears to be a senseless banter of trivialities.

> McCann. Why did you leave the organization?
> Goldberg. What would your old mum say, Webber?

McCann. Why did you betray us?
Goldberg. You hurt me, Webber. You're playing a dirty game.
McCann. That's a Black and Tan fact.
Goldberg. Who does he think he is?
McCann. Who do you think you are?
Stanley. You're on the wrong horse.
Goldberg. When did you come to this place?
Stanley. Last year.
Goldberg. Where did you come from?
Stanley. Somewhere else.
Goldberg. Why did you come here?
Stanley. My feet hurt!
Goldberg. Why did you stay?
Stanley. I had a headache!
Goldberg. Did you take anything for it?
Stanley. Yes.
Goldberg. What?
Stanley. Fruit salts!
Goldberg. Enos or Andrews?
Stanley. En--An--
Goldberg. Did you stir properly? Did they fizz?
Stanley. No, now, wait, you--
Goldberg. Did they fizz? Did they fizz? or didn't they fizz?
McCann. He doesn't know!
Goldberg. You don't know. When did you last have a bath?
Stanley. I have one every--
Goldberg. Don't lie.
McCann. You betrayed the organization. I know him![48]

The discord occurs between the tone of the official interrogation and the subject matter which is one of fruit salts, headaches and personal hygiene.

The scoffing at social conventions is clear in the scene of the birthday party in which the importance given to ceremonial speeches and toasts, the formalities, is ridiculed and presented in ironic tones. The whole idea of the celebration of the birthday party is ironic in itself because Stanley, who is the reason for the party, is in no mood for merry-making and furthermore, he perceives himself as being tortured during the event. In fact, he is undergoing a severe psychological crisis, but everyone around him insists on maintaining a relatively trivial convention such as holding a party for the occasion of his birthday. The scenario itself is ludicrous enough. Five grown people play a silly children's game, the

lights go out and they are all on their hands and knees reaching and tugging and trying to find their way around. This is again a metaphor for the pratfall or the base condition of human beings crawling on their hands and knees. The scene culminates in a kind of hysterical giggle emitted by Stanley, who seems to have gone mad, first trying to strangle Meg and then in laying Lulu on the table as a sacrificial figure. The discrepancy here occurs between the seriousness of the situation, Stanley's breakdown, and the treatment of it which is one of revelling, toasting and making speeches.

Various other subjects are mocked in this play. One of them is the upholding of the family as a respectful institution and as a unit of happiness. Instead, Pinter exposes it as a well of violence, dissension and infidelity. The work ethic, represented by Goldberg, is also torn apart and shown to be a ludicrous and insincere doctrine.

In Questa sera, Pirandello mocks theatrical conventions in both the players and in the audience. He ridicules the mechanical obedience to certain established traditions, such as the sounding of the gong which habitually indicates that the audience should quieten down because the play is about to begin. When this expected sequence is disturbed, the audience rebels agitatedly at the change, showing their slavish attitude toward conventions. The laughter here results from the overturning of decorum. What ensues is an animated debate between the director and the audience, two groups which customarily don't have an audible voice in a performance. The audience tries to pressure the director into following certain established practices to which they have become accustomed. Through this debate Pirandello exposes the silliness of the audience in their pompous

theatrical attitude. There is a lot of hubbub in the audience as the spectators try to determine what is part of the play and what is not and whether the play has begun or not. These preoccupations are hyperbolic caricatures of the pretentious attitudes and manners of theatre-goers. Pirandello does not stop with mockery of the audience, he shows the players as also being concerned with trivialities which they appropriate as their pet subjects. They banter among themselves regarding their parts, their lines, their entrances and their exits. In general, the play mocks social attitudes from the stereo-typing of the Sicilians to the religious ceremonies that are considered sacred. It parodies various literary styles and genres, for example, the melodrama, the customary intermission and the improvised comedy. In Questa sera, one of the chief farcical moments occurs when Sampognetta, the chief actor, is to die on stage. He suddenly finds himself unable to play the part seriously and he feels more like laughing than dying. Here the contrast between the performance and the performer are highlighted. The end is equally farcical. Hinkfuss, the director, realizes that the scene of the tragic death has failed, so he apologizes and promises a better performance for the following night.

Ionesco's work, Rhinoceros also demonstrates farcical tendencies. In this play, there is a high sense of improbability. Two men are seated at a cafe on a quiet Sunday morning, when all of a sudden, a rhinoceros comes trotting by, leaving everyone in utter dismay and creating chaos. Immediately in this scene one can identify three of the central elements of farce. One of them is the upsetting of the normal order of things by turning the social conventions upside down. This leads to the other farcical device of creating chaos and havoc. Farce functions best in an environment in

which the physical and social orders have been disrupted. In this play the appearance of the rhinoceros has completely shattered the normal Sunday routines of this small French town. All of the town's people have come out to witness the event. They have been jolted out of their Sunday routines by the noise and the dust created by the passing beast. As a consequence, the waitress has dropped her tray and the housewife has dropped her basket (pratfall) with all its provisions. On the second appearance of a rhinoceros, still within the same morning, only a brief time after the first, Jean stands up and knocks over his chair and the old gentleman follows suit. (This is an example of Bergson's 'snowball' comic device); a cat gets run over. Hence the ordinary Sunday morning has been turned into an unrecognizable sequence of strange events. Farce has a way of doing that; it takes our orderly world and transforms it into a mad-house. Rhinoceros also uses the usual bantering back and forth format of the farce. In the beginning of the play, Jean and Berenger are seated at a cafe engaging in just this kind of exchange. They call each other names; they accuse each other of their respective vices and faults. In this exchange, Jean becomes the target of the 'slings and arrows' of mockery. His fears are brought to the surface. Later on, in the third act, his fears turn into paranoia; he continuously asks for reassurance that he is not growing a rhinoceros horn. He asks about the nature of his voice and whether his cough sounds natural!

> Berenger (inquiet). - Oui, ça m'a fait tousser. Comment ai-je toussé?
> Dudard. - Comme tout le monde, quand on boit quelque chose d'un peu fort.
> Berenger (allant déposer le verre et la bouteille sur la table). - Ce n'était pas une toux étrange? c'était bien une véritable toux humaine?
> Dudard. - Qu'allez-vous chercher? C'était une toux humaine. Quel autre genre de toux cela aurait-il pu être?

> Berenger. - Je ne sais pas ... Une toux d'animal, peut-être ... Est-ce que ça tousse un rhinocéros?[49]

He becomes increasingly worried about the disease that has swept the entire town; he wonders about immunity; he checks the mirror every few minutes for visible signs of the disease; he examines himself carefully.

In this work, there is also the fool, in the shapes of the Logician and the gullible old gentleman who engage in ludicrous conversations and who arrive at such absurd syllogisms as:

> Le chat a quatre pattes. Isidore et Fricot ont chacun quatre pattes. Donc Isidore et Fricot sont chats.
>
> Mon chien aussi a quatre pattes.
>
> Alors, c'est un chat.
>
> Autre syllogisme: tous les chats sont mortels. Socrate est mortel. Donc Socrate est un chat.[50]

Farce - Part II: Vaudeville, Clowning, Lazzi

Connected with farce is the 'clowning' tradition. Clowning is performed exclusively to elicit laughter. This tradition can easily be traced to the commedia dell'arte, for it is in the commedia that the comic began to turn into a clown. The group of zanni are the ancestors of the slapstick buffoons of the vaudeville stage and the circus ring. It is this group who began to acquire some of the clown's characteristics such as improvisations, routines, pranks, joking and nonsense talk. Like the travelling circus, the Italian troupes travelled through Europe carrying all their equipment with them. The link between what came to be recognized as clowns and the zanni is most apparent in their stage behaviour. Both groups function as a humour device; their stage activities consist mainly in stirring things up, creating agitation and confusion, making noise and

hilarity, cavorting, playing pranks and generally keeping the action moving. Of foremost importance in this connection are the zanni's elaborate lazzi as turns in the action, physical beatings and other general comic routings. These can be either physical or verbal. The modern comic or clown performs similar routines which are based on a formula and which are primarily riddles, quibbles, anecdotes or hoaxes occurring as interludes in the main action as delays to create suspense or simply as a means to end the act, as a framing device, as it were. Riccoboni's lengthy explanation of such tricks is worthy of mention because it illustrates very clearly what, in fact, a lazzi is and how it is inserted into the scenarios.

> Dans le pièce d'Arlequin Dévaliseur de Maisons, Arlequin et Scapin sont valets de Flaminia, qui est une pauvre fille éloignée de ses parens, et qui est réduite à la derniere misere. Arlequin se plaint à son camarade de la facheuse situation de la diette qu'il fait depuis long-tems. Scapin le console et lui dit qu'il va pourvoir à tout: il lui ordonne de faire du bruit devant la maison: Flaminia attirée par le cris d'Arlequin lui en demande la cause, Scapin lui explique la sujet de leur querelle, Arlequin crie toûjours et dit qu'il veut l'abandonner, Flaminia le prie de ne point le quitter et se recommande à Scapin, qui lui fait une proposition pour la tirer honnêtement de la misere qui l'accable; pendant que Scapin explique son projet à Flaminia, Arlequin par differns 'lazzi' interrompt la scene: tantôt il s'imagine d'avoir dans son chapeau des cherises qu'il fait semblant de manger, et d'en jetter les noiaux au visage de Scapin: tantôt de vouloir attraper une mouche qui vole, de lui couper corniquement les aîles et de la manger, et choses pareilles, voilà le jeu de Théâtre qu'on appelle "lazzi".[51]

One of these kinds of routines relies heavily on the technique of repetition. Bergson calls this the 'snowball' device of comedy.[52] Kathleen Lea gives a very good example of this technique from the commedia dell'arte. She says:

> The most interesting contribution to the art of farce construction made by the commedia dell'arte was the device of deliberate repetition. When something happens three times we laugh, whether

it is a joke or not.

And the example that she quotes is as follows:

> The simplest form is the 'burla' of the cuff. When Aurelia and Flaminia are tired of arguing in the street, Flaminia gives Aurelia a blow and goes into the house, leaving Aurelia's blow to fall on Pantalone, who comes up the street at that moment; Aurelia disappears and Pantalone hits Coviello, Coviello's blow falls on Lelio, Lelio's on Franceschina and Franceschina's on Zanni who is the last arrival.[53]

In addition to these examples from the commedia dell'arte, Lea quotes two instances from modern theatre and cinema. Charlie Chaplin eats bootlaces for spaghetti and Stanislavsky's comedian pretends to have a hair in his mouth.[54] Essentially these routines which are dependent on repetition and "snowball" are the laugh-getters of the plays and they are elements usually closely associated with the tradition of farce.

Strains of this tradition of tricks endure in the avant-garde theatre; these frequently coincide with what is considered farcical in the plays because they are moments in which actions are stretched to utmost absurdity. Multiple examples of these can be found in our modern playwrights' works.

In Beckett's work, Waiting for Godot, there is the well-known hat scene, here reproduced; and it is a very good example of a commedia dell'arte type of physical lazzi.

> Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat. Estragon adjusts Vladimir's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Estragon's hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Lucky's hat. Vladimir adjusts Estragon's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Lucky's hat in place of Vladimir's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes his hat. Estragon adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on his hat in place of Estragon's which he hands to Estragon. ...[55]

From this scene one can recognize the typical exchange of an object between

a group of people, creating confusion and hilarity. It also becomes clear from this scene that the lazzi acts as an interlude, slowing down the action, stretching it out, and generally creating suspense. Notice how after the lazzi, one is returned to the ordinary business of the play. Vladimir asks: "how does it fit me?" A second example of this kind of interplay is the verbal nonsense exchange in which the level of foolery is sustained for a prolonged period, as occurs in the following scene of departure between Estragon, Pozzo and Vladimir:

> Estragon. Then adieu.
> Pozzo. Adieu.
> Vladimir. Adieu.
> Pozzo. Adieu.
> Silence. No one moves.
> Vladimir. Adieu
> Pozzo. Adieu
> Estragon. Adieu
> Silence.
> Pozzo. And thank you.
> Vladimir. Thank you.
> Pozzo. Not at all.
> Estragon. Yes. yes.
> Pozzo. No. no.
> Vladimir. Yes. yes.
> Estragon. No. no.
> Silence.[56]

This exchange of goodbyes is comical because of its repetitious nature but also because it ends in the most obvious understatement - "I don't seem to be able ... to depart." In the tradition of the lazzi, it is a momentary suspension in the play diverting the attention from the main action to peripheral and playful episodes. In comedy this is commonly known as 'oiling of the wheels.' This tradition of merrymaking has been continued through the slapstick and the clown. In the lineage of the zanni, the clowns and the avant-garde characters, the connection is also preserved in aspects other than stage action and speech. Like the zanni, the clowns and Charlie Chaplin, Beckett's characters maintain the common anti-heroic

appearance. Like Charlie Chaplin, they are tramps clad in torn clothing. The zanni's multi-coloured costume also had lowly origins. In the beginning it was a patchwork of rags. Hence Beckett remains faithful in costume as well as in action to the clowning tradition as it appeared on the Italian stage.

Can Pinter's characters be grouped among this same family? There are residual indications. In The Caretaker, Davies is a homeless clown whose clothes are torn. His behaviour can be classified as clownish in that he makes a lot of noise, creating confusion and agitation by disrupting the routine lives of the two brothers. He gets involved in a few routines himself, as can be seen from the passage quoted below:

> Davies stands still. He waits a few seconds, then goes to the door, opens it, looks out, closes it, stands with his back to it, turns swiftly, opens it, looks out, comes back, closes the door, finds the keys in his pocket, tries one, tries the other, locks the door. He looks about the room. He then goes quickly to Aston's bed, bends, brings out a pair of shoes and examines them.[57]

This routine of examinations, repetitions and suspicions is resonant of the sequences executed by the clown to evoke laughter from his audience and to draw attention to the action itself. The bag routine (mentioned earlier in connection with farce) is also another example of this histrionic art. In The Birthday Party, there is the revelling atmosphere of the party in which the characters are in a state of inebriation, singing songs and playing games. Here action becomes ritualized in a comic sense and the group of characters can be seen as 'horsing around' and making mischief by such actions as turning out the lights, blindfolding each other, and taking the other person's glasses.

Jarry's character, Ubu, is another descendant of the zanni, although

the 'clowning' is of a much more grotesque nature. There are, however, the typical beatings and pursuits that occur in the commedia dell'arte and the repeated instances of word plays in which the mere foolishness of the characters is made to stand out. An example of this kind of word play is quoted below:

> Père Ubu: Ainsi que le coquelicot et le pissenlit à la fleur de leur âge sont fauchés par l'impitoyable faucheur qui fauche impitoyablement leur pitoyable binette, ainsi le petit Rensky a fait le coquelicot, il s'est fort bien battu cependant, mais aussi, il y avait trop des Russes.[58]

Another similar speech demonstrates Ubu's malapropisms; it is as follows:

> Le Commandant: Amenez le grand foc, prenez un ris aux huniers!
>
> Père Ubu: Ceci n'est pas mal, c'est même bon! Entendez-vous, monsieur l'Equipage? Amenez le grand coq et allez faire un tour dans les pruniers.[59]

Ubu continues in the clowning tradition by being unable to keep things straight, so he declares, "j'ai des oneilles pur parler et vous une bouche pour m'entendre."[60]

Perhaps of all the playwrights in this group, it is Ionesco who most fully exploits the tradition of the cavorting zanni of the commedia dell'arte. In both Rhinoceros and The Bald Soprano there are numerous verbal, physical and gestural tricks. In The Bald Soprano there is a mixture of a verbal and physical lazzi as the four characters follow a sequence of rapid recital of cliches, maxims, nonsense, riddles, tongue twisters. The rhythm is a very rapid one which increases as the scene progresses. This scene can be played effectively in a cabaret style routine or dance which has a set pattern of steps executed with precision and in which the characters' movements intersect; this incorporates the physical and the verbal play. In Rhinoceros, a lazzi which can be named the 'after-you' routine can be cited,

This is a common comic formula which takes the form of a gesture of exaggerated courtesy in allowing someone to precede you in going through a door. As it occurs in this play, it is rendered more ridiculous because it is so incongruous with the situation. The characters in this scene are being rescued by fire fighters and they must exit through the window. At this moment they decide to indulge in this exaggerated form of politeness. This kind of lazzi, quoted below also serves to end the scene.

> Le Pompier. Allons, allons ...
> Bérenger, montrant la fenêtre. Après vous.
> Dudard, à Bérenger. Après vous.
> Bérenger, à Dudard. Oh non, après vous.
> Dudard à Bérenger. Pas du tout, après vous.
> Bérenger à Dudard. Je vous en prie, après vous, après vous.[61]

These tricks, interludes, episodes anecdotes, or whatever name they may be given, form an integral part of the avant-garde theatre. Their basic structure is that of the zanni's tradition of joking and playing tricks and these have been carried to the vaudeville stage and to the circus ring.

Burlesque/Obscene Language/Vulgarities

This section will treat the elements of burlesque, obscenity and vulgarity as another common ground of the Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre. The word 'burlesque' is derived from the Italian 'burla' which means 'ridicule.' Burlesque can be defined as "the use or imitation of serious matter or manner, made amusing by the creation of an incongruity between style and subject."[62] American burlesque is usually taken to mean some kind of variety show emphasizing sex and including strip-tease dancers. The genre is said to have originated with Aristophanes whose works comprised spoofs on current events in the forms of parodies, puns and wisecracks alongside sexual themes and fleshly descriptions of a bawdy nature. Because

I have already discussed the themes of parody and mockery in connection with satire and farce, I will limit this section to the sexual allusions and the bawdiness as parts of burlesque. In addition, here it is appropriate to look at the tendency to use vulgarities, which we find in both theatres. This points to the concern, in both cases, with coarseness and physicality of the individual in its lower and baser functions.

In both the Italian comedies and the avant-garde theatre, the tendency to use the sexual and the vulgar is linked with the pleasurable breaking of social conventions and proprieties. The evidence for this lies in two areas: physical actions of the characters and their language. In a play like La Calandria, there are occasions of sexual allusions, such as the following:

> Fessenio. Fermati, Polinico. Sai tu che effetti fa amore?
> Polinico. Che? bestia!
> Fessenio. Quelli del tartufo, che a' giovani fa rizzar la ventura
> e a' vecchi tirar coregge.
> Lidio. Ah! ah! ah![63]

Typical of the commedia dell'arte plots, a play like La Mandragola makes numerous sexual allusions in gestures as well as in language. The carrying out of the deception by Callimaco necessitates the sexual intrigues. Messer Nicia, a foolish old doctor-type, is married to a beautiful and chaste young woman, Lucrezia. Callimaco falls in love with her and must contrive a plot to become her lover. In the carrying out of this scheme, everyone including the mother and the priest, indulge in a bit of bawdy fun, until in the end, the husband is cuckolded in his own bed. From one of Flaminio Scala's scenarios, Il Vecchio Geloso, the love intrigue between the two young people is similar and sexual innuendos are echoed as the young Orazio and Isabella become lovers. The preponderance of the coarse

is connected with the farce, because farce deals with the baser nature of the individual. Because the coarse and the obscene are also sometimes connected, they will be dealt with together. In the introduction by Ferruccio Marotti to Scala's Il Teatro delle favole rappresentative, he speaks of the commedia's use of both these ingredients, as one of its foci. Here is his description of some of the scenes in the above-mentioned commedia:

> Tale è la scena finale dell'atto secondo, quando Isabella esce dalla casa di Pasquella davanti alla cui porta Pantalone ha montato la guardia (nessuno vada a disturbare la moglie che dentro 'fa un servizio'), mentre Isabella non è andata di corpo e s'è fatta velocemente montare da Orazio, ed ora esce tutta sudata: "Pantalone subito la rasciuga col suo fazzoletto dicendole che quando gli vengono quelle volontà che se le cavi, e non patisca". Una scena acre di sesso urina e sudore che ricorda l'impietosa e sgradevole uscita di Messer Nicia, ma che finisce per risolversi nella breve risata dell' aneddoto comico quando Burattino già racconta ciò che il pubblico ha appena visto, la storia di Pantalone, Orazio e Isabella, e di come "finito che ebbe l'accorta moglie il suo amoroso lavoro, se ne usci fuori di casa tutta sudata per la fatica che fatta aveva e dal suo pietoso marito le fu detto, che quando mai gli venissero simili voglie, che se le cavasse e non stesse a patire, e asciugandole il sudore in volto l'accarezzava."
>
> Il gioco di specchi (qui arguto e insieme placido, non ancora in fuga all'infinito come nei giochi di teatro nel teatro) non esaurisce, però il tono dominante de Il vecchio geloso. In un felice alternarsi di scene di insieme e di scene a pochi personaggi, il clima della vita in villa scandisce lo svolgersi dell'azione, che si distende o si interrompe sul ritmo del passatempo, del riposo e della pausa per desinare. Sul ritmo di bisogni elementari e naturale (mangiare, orinare, fare l'amore: Burattino riprende la figlia che è già da marito e non sa né zappare né piantare, e "le da alcune lezzione di maneggiare il manico della zappa"; Orazio e Isabella rompono la lettiera nella foga dell'amore: Pasquella viene in quattro a quattr' otto pressa per forza; Isabella suda; Pantalone non resiste al bisogno di dormire; Pantalone è impotente): bisogni e impulsi elementari ingentiliti dalla 'civilta' dei cittadini che son lì per una pausa soltanto, ...[64]

From this passage is becomes obvious that the concerns of the commedia often revert to the basic physical needs and the jokes rely on their sug-

gestiveness to get the laughs.

In Jarry, we find few allusions made to obscenity, but the play is full of the vulgar and the coarse especially since Ubu is the very embodiment of coarseness. Throughout the play, Ubu displays a particular crudeness in manners as well as in language. His vocabulary is punctuated with expressions such as "merdre," "miserable," "batard," "coquine" and "charogne." He is also crude in personality and frequent reference is made to his objectionable smell. The aspect of burlesque that can be found in this work is the kind of burlesque that parodies, but is not necessarily of a sexual nature. As discussed in an earlier section, the most obvious parodies here are those of the Shakespearian tragedies. It also mocks the Latin ritual of the mass by having Ubu read from it while they are in battle.

Pinter's works, in general, have equal amounts of obscenities and vulgarities in them. One finds ample evidence of illicit sexual activity in his plays. This material is usually presented in enigmatic terms, providing only the suggestion and not the exact reference. Things are left unexplained. This is exactly the case in The Caretaker; there is a reference made by Mick to his mother's bed in connection with Davies. Although the character of the mother never appears in the play, Mick warns Davies to "keep your hands off my old mum" and not to "start taking liberties with my old mother."[65] This overt sexual reference remains unexplained and undeveloped, it is simply there hovering over the conversation. Aston also speaks of a sexual incident which he recounts to Davies. He speaks about a woman who propositioned him in a cafe. He says that they were talking about her holiday when "suddenly she put her hand over mine ...

and she said, how would you like me to have a look at your body?"[66] As one can see, in Pinter's works sexual activity is connected with what is illicit, dirty and out-of-the-ordinary. In a play such as The Homecoming, the women are spoken of as whores. The mother is represented as a whore and so is Teddy's wife, Ruth. She indulges in a kind of surrealist sexual behaviour with all of her husband's brothers and by the end of the play, she decides not to follow her husband back to America, but to remain with his family who are going to 'set her up' in a kind of prostitution business.

A similar personality reappears in The Birthday Party. Here, Lulu a young woman, freely indulges in casual sexual activity with the newly arrived guest, Goldberg. Again, this is never explicitly stated; nevertheless, the implications are there. At Stanley's birthday party, Lulu is portrayed as sexually liberated and rather promiscuous; she is a kind of nymphet. She sits on Goldberg's lap and he "fondles" her.[67] She is presented as a coquette. The older woman, Meg, is also involved sexually in some way. She has a mother-son relationship with her boarder, Stanley. But this relationship has an Oedipal nature. Numerous references are made to this unspoken sexual involvement. At the opening of the play, there is an ambiguous statement made about Meg bringing up Stanley's tea in the morning. This can be read in two ways. One is the mother caring for the child and the other, is the mother and child playing a sexual game. The description itself is innocent enough, but the stage directions that accompany it are very suggestive and can easily provoke an interpretation of the following scene as one in which there is a level of sexual allusions which are suspended in the details of the events.

> Meg. I always take him up his cup of tea. But that was a long time ago.

> Petey. Did he drink it?
> Meg. I made him. I stood there till he did. I'm going to call him. (She goes to the door). Stan! Stanny! (She listens.) Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count to three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you! (She exits and goes upstairs. In a moment, shouts from Stanley, wild laughter from Meg. Petey takes his plate to the hatch. Shouts. Laughter. Petey sits at the table. Silence. She returns.) He's coming down. (She is panting and arranges her hair.) I told him if he didn't hurry up he'd get no breakfast.[68]

In addition, there are sexual allusions in the vocabulary and the actions of the two characters. Words like 'succulent' and actions such as, "Meg ruffles Stanley's hair," she 'strokes his arm' are all double-meaning words and actions which convey motherly or filial affection but which could, also carry an amorous connotation. It is never clearly established in the play; this is Pinter's style; he packs scenes with all sorts of undercurrents which are inserted in the vocabulary and in the actions of his characters, but ultimately he leaves the shades of meanings mysteriously unresolved.

The vulgar in his plays borders on violence. But the coarse is often found in the vocabulary of some of the characters. Here, for example, is its obvious presence in Davies' speech:

> "the manners of pigs"
> "that bastard monk"
> "piss off"
> "you thieving bastard, you thieving skate, where's the bloody box."[69]

Furthermore, it is said of him that he "stinks" and that he is a "dog" and a "wild animal."

In The Birthday Party that which has been classified as coarse behaviour is associated with a state of instability. Stanley's behaviour

which appears to be that of a scurrilous knave is more characteristic of an individual who is undergoing a psychological breakdown. He manifests a brusque and unfriendly character; he is described as frequently groaning, as being negligent of his appearance and as being rather hostile in the mornings. Although this kind of behaviour is associated with an entirely different situation than it is in some of the other plays, it is still there and it is reinforced by examples of coarse expressions like "bastard sweat pit," which are integral parts of the language of some of the characters.

Beckett makes a few sexual allusions in Waiting for Godot. They are only incidental, like Estragon's tale of a brothel which he does not finish[70] and the mention of an erection at the idea of hanging. Here is the incident:

> Estragon. What about hanging ourselves?
> Vladimir. Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
> Estragon. (highly excited). An erection!
> Vladimir. With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?
> Estragon. Let's hang ourselves immediately![71]

What Godot lacks in sexual suggestiveness, it makes up in its use of the vulgar. The two tramps are concerned with such base things as keeping up their trousers, buttoning their flies and urinating. They spit and urinate and crawl about in the mud in their 'muck heap.' Lucky is referred to by such unpleasant and offensive names as "pig," "scum," and "hog." Both tramps are said to smell; one has "stinking breath" and the other has "stinking feet."[72]

From these references it can be concluded that there is a general concern with the vulgar and the sexual in both theatres under discussion.

(The sexual references in comedy are more ample in the Italian works because they belong to a tradition of mediterranean liberalism while the Anglo-Saxon tradition has always been less explicit and less plentiful in the use of bawdiness and sexual references). Perhaps the vulgar and the sexual are shock elements, perhaps they are there for popular appeal, or they are added for the purpose of entertainment. Nevertheless, both theatres exploit this kind of material, inserting it into their works either explicitly or implicitly, and molding it into their characters.

Regionalisms, Dialects and Popular Language

Finally, in this section I will discuss the appearance of dialects and other peripheral linguistic expressions in the Italian comedies as well as in the avant-garde theatre. Beginning with the Italian theatre, one of the most important contributors to this period in the use of a natural language was the Paduan playwright, Angelo Beolco, commonly known as Ruzzante. He is often considered a precursor of the commedia dell'arte because of his clever blends of the serious and the comical, his use of stock characters and above all, his use of a natural language for the characters instead of the less known formal languages such Tuscan and Latin. His plays and dialogues abound with the natural dialects of Padova, Bergamo and Venezia. He emphasized the simple life of the Paduan peasants, depicting them in their natural environment and their realistic concerns. Ruzzante was committed to the use of dialect in his works as a necessary condition of naturalism. Since the commedia dell'arte's appeal was to the popular audience, it made ample usage of colloquialisms and dialects. One of the peculiarities of the zanni was their speech patterns. The masks in this comedy represent certain groups with regional references. Often their

speeches were delivered in dialect full of local colour. Pantalone spoke a Venetian appropriate to his mercantile class; Gratiano spoke the Bolognese of the learned man and Pulcinella spoke the Neapolitan of the streets. There is also evidence that the commedia included songs and sonnets which were sung and spoken in dialect. The Captain, because he is often played as a foreigner, has a peculiar language with heavy traces of a foreign language, often Spanish. If not a Spaniard, then the Captain would have a Calabrian salutation, a Venetian, Neapolitan or Sicilian dialogue. The whole idea of the commedia depends on these differentiations in speech. The mockery of regional, professional and class peculiarities that the masks stem from is based on the use of a language that will identify the character with his region, his profession or his social class. Examples of this differentiation also occur in the commedia erudita. In La Calandria, for instance, there is a porter (facchino) whose language reflects the local colour of the bergamesk that was closely associated with the profession. The use of dialects is used in the two types of comedies for different reasons. In the commedia erudita and in Ruzzante, there was a large preoccupation with naturalism and realism. In the commedia dell'arte, the concern was instead with popularity and hence the dialects were essential.

A similar trend can be detected in the avant-theatre; the playwrights of this type of theatre looked to marginal areas for their selection of a theatrical language. They gathered characters and situations from outside the respectable circles. Jarry as a first representative of this group, developed a peculiar manner of speaking which he imparted to his character Père Ubu, but which he himself was later to adopt in his real life. This manner of speaking is described as "relentless, without inflection or nuance, with an equal accentuation on all syllables, even the mutes."[73] Père Ubu,

according to Jarry, was to have "an accent or rather a special 'voice'."[74] Hence Jarry tried to look outside the accepted theatrical traditions to portray his character's linguistic side. His concern is more with something that can be identified with the surrealists than with any other kind of work.

Beckett and Ionesco do not so much make use of any specific dialect or regional language. These two playwrights explore instead a kind of language of nonsense. Again, there is a tendency to look beyond the confines of the literary language. Note in the speech below how the flow of the language seems to move of its own accord, as if by association but without actual references.

Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?
Vladimir: Were you not there?
Estragon: I can't have been listening.
Vladimir: Oh..., Nothing very definite.
Estragon: A kind of prayer.
Vladimir: Precisely.
Estragon: A vague supplication.
Vladimir: Exactly.
Estragon: And what did he reply?
Vladimir: That he'd see.
Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.
Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.
Estragon: In the quiet of his home.
Vladimir: Consult his family.
Estragon: His friends.
Vladimir: His agents.
Estragon: His correspondents.
Vladimir: His books.
Estragon: His bank account.
Vladimir: Before taking a decision.

Estragon: It's the normal thing.[75]

Then there is also the very peculiar speech delivered by Lucky full of nonsense derived from onomatopeic references such as "quaquaqua," "Acacacacademy" and "Essy-in-Possy."[76]

Ionesco exploits this mode of speaking even further than Beckett. The dialogues reproduced below demonstrate how talk has been reduced to a formula of nonsense. The four characters in La cantatrice chauve sit around 'telling stories' that have no consequence, no interest, no plots, and no real meaning. Here is one that the fire chief tells which is called "Le Rheume" (The Headcold):

> Mon beau-frère avait, du côté paternel, un cousin germain dont un oncle maternel avait un beau-père dont le grand-père paternel avait épousé en secondes noces une jeune indigène dont le frère avait rencontré, dans un de ses voyages, une fille dont il s'était epris et avec laquelle il eut un fils qui se maria avec une pharmacienne intrépide qui n'était autre que la nièce d'un quartier-maitre inconnu de la Marine britannique et dont le père adoptif avait un tante parlant couramment l'espagnol et qui était...[77]

and the story goes on for another half page recounting very little. Towards the end of this play, the two couples hurl out nonsense upon nonsense; here is a sampling:

> M. Smith: Kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes, kakatoes.
> Mme. Smith: Quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade, quelle cacade.
> M. Martin: Quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacades, quelle cascade de cacade.[78]

In a way this kind of speech can be compared to the exaggeration of the fool who utters all his half-wit nonsense and who pretends to have the answers to everything. Nonsense cannot be qualified as a form of dialect

but it can be identified as a form of speaking which is very odd and in which we can see the search for a new means of expression rather than the worn-out, accepted, educated patterns of speech which were imposed on theatrical productions for centuries.

Pinter perhaps is the playwright in this group who approximates most closely the use of dialects as it appeared in the Italian comedies. Pinter's characters often have their own way of speaking. In The Caretaker, Davies is presented as a suspiciously foreign character whose identity remains unconfirmed. This idea of not belonging identifies him with the Italian character, Capitano and the Zanni. Like the Capitano and the Zanni who speaks his peculiar bergamask, Davies has a 'funny' way of speaking that sets him apart from the rest. In analysing parts of his speech, one discovers certain odd manners and grammatical peculiarities about it. Notice the underlined words in his speech, how unconventional they are and how he omits certain parts of speech. His speech is characterized by the typical regionalisms of a London district.

> who was this git to come and give me orders?
> We got the same standing.
> He's nothing superior to me.
> I said where I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with some respect. We was brought up with the right ideas.
> ... after the guvnor give me the bullet.
> I bet he's having a poke around in it now this very moment.
> It's different when you're kipping out.[79]

Expressions like 'give me the bullet,' 'poke around' and 'kipping out' are parts of colloquialisms, that are associated with the language of the streets and not of the academies.

In The Birthday Party, Goldberg demonstrates similar linguistic tendencies. His speech is characterized by expressions such as are under-

lined below:

> Why are you getting on everybody's wick? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk?[80]
>
> You skedaddled from the wedding.[81]
>
> You left her in the pudding club.[82]

The use of dialects and popular language in the two theatrical periods points to a concern with identity, with the evolution of language and with the widening representation of characters chosen not from the typical catalogue of stage personages but rather those who tend to have been given rare appearances on the theatrical stages. It shows a kind of revolt, an unwillingness to conform to the established forms.

NOTES

[1] Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, tr. by Ulrich Weisstein. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 21.

[2] Howard Daniel, ed., Callot's Etchings (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), pp. 104-27

[3] Alfred Jarry, "On the Futility of the 'Theatrical' in the Theatre", tr. Barbara Wright in Ubu Roi (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1961), p. 180. Subsequent references will be noted simply as Ubu Roi.

[4] Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi suivi de Ubu enchaîné (Paris: Le Livre Club du Libraire, 1965), p. 2. These words are quoted in the introduction to the text by Claude Bonnefoy. Subsequent references to this text will be noted as Ubu Roi, Fr. text.

[5] Barbara Wright's introduction to Ubu Roi, pp. ix-x.

[6] Ubu Roi, p. 174.

[7] Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954) tr. by author, p. 13b.

[8] Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature tr. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 135. He writes: "In the grotesque theatre, the division of the Self has become the guiding principle of characterization, and the notion of the unity of personality is completely abandoned."

[9] Godot, pp. 34a and 59a.

[10] Godot, p. 17b, here Estragon and Vladimir describe Lucky's sores.

[11] This quotation is taken from Dr. Johnson as it appears in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 738.

[12] Leonard Feinberg, Introduction to Satire (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1967), p. 19.

[13] Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 234. In this book Highet quotes from Horace's Sermones 1.1.24.

[14] Highet, p. 18.

[15] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, pp. 81-2.

[16] William Shakespeare, Macbeth in William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), II, ii, 34-57.

[17] Ubu Roi, pp. 130-131.

[18] Godot, p. 25b.

[19] Godot, p. 26b.

[20] Godot, p. 23a and b.

[21] Harold Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 60.

[22] Hartnoll, Phyllis ed., The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 205.

[23] Robert Corrigan, ed., Comedy, Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1965), p. 300.

[24] Corrigan, p. 324, essay by Robert Stephenson, "Farce as Method."

[25] Albert Bermel, Farce. A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 45-6.

[26] Henri Bergson, Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, tr. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: MacMillan and Co., 1911), p. 5.

[27] Jessica Milner Davis, Farce. The Critical Idiom, 39 (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1978), p. 23. Also elaborated on p. 85.

[28] Davis, pp. 23-4, and p. 85.

[29] Eric Bentley, "The Psychology of Farce" in Let's Get a Divorce and Other Plays (New York: Hill & Wang, 1958), pp. vii-xx.

[30] Bergson, p. 198. He writes: "...laughter cannot be absolutely just. Nor should it be kind-hearted either. Its function is to intimidate by humiliting. Now, it would not succeed in doing this, had not nature implanted for that very purpose, even in the best of men, a spark of spitefulness or, at all events, of mischief."

[31] Davis, p. 87-8.

[32] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 15.

[33] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, end of Act II, p. 52.

[34] Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi suivi de Ubu enchâîné (Paris: Livre Club du Libraire, 1965), p. 22.

[35] Ubu Roi, p. 180-1.

[36] Ubu Roi, Fr. text; p. 18.

[37] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 122.

[38] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 57.

[39] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 59.

[40] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 67.

[41] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, pp. 88-9.

[42] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 131.

[43] Ubu Roi, introduction to English text, p. vi.

[44] Godot, p. 44a

[45] The Caretaker, p. 38.

[46] Eric Bentley, "Farce" in Life of the Drama (Atheneum, 1964); my reference is taken from Corrigan, p. 299.

[47] Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), p. 48.

[48] The Birthday Party, p. 48.

[49] Eugene Ionesco, Le Rhinoceros (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp. 146-7.

[50] Le Rhinocéros, pp. 38-39.

[51] Louis Ricoboni, Histoire du Théâtre italien. Vol. I & II (Turin: Bottega d'Ersama, 1968), p. 90.

[52] Bergson, p. 80, he writes: "Take, for instance, the rolling snow-ball, which increases in size as it moves along. We might just as well

think of toy soldiers standing behind one another. Push the first and it tumbles down on the second, this latter knocks down the third, and the state of things goes from bad to worse until they all lie prone on the floor. ... These instances are all different, but they suggest the same abstract vision, that of an effect which grows by arithmetical progression, so that the cause, insignificant at the outset, culminates by a necessary evolution as important as it is unexpected."

[53] Kathleen M. Lea, Italian Popular Comedy. A Study in the Commedia dell'arte, 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the English Stage. Vols I & II (Oxford: The Charendon Press, 1934), p. 195.

[54] Lea, p. 67.

[55] Godot, p. 46 a and b.

[56] Godot, p. 31a.

[57] The Caretaker, p. 28.

[58] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 99.

[59] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, 129-30.

[60] Ubu Roi, Fr. text, p. 73.

[61] Le Rhinocéros, p. 109.

[62] John D. Dump, Burlesque, The Critical Idiom 22 (Britain: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 1. John D. Dump quotes this definition taken from Richmond P. Bond's book English Burlesque Poetry 1700-1750, p. 3.

[63] Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, La Calandria from Commedie del Cinquecento, Vol. II (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1967), p. 32. My own translation of the passage follows;

Fessenio: Stay Polinico. Do you know what effects love causes?
Polinico: What? Beast!
Fessenio: Those of the truffle, that to the young it erects their fortune and to the old, it makes them fart!
Lidio: Ha! ha! ha!

[64] Flaminio Scala, Il teatro delle favole rappresentative, ed. Ferruccio Marotti. Archivio del teatro italiano, 7 (Milan: Edizioni il Polifico, 1976), pp. LVII & LVIII.

> Such is the final scene of the second act, when Isabella comes out of Pasquella's house in front of whose door Pantalone was keeping guard (so that nobody would go in to disturb his wife who was taking care of her needs), in the meantime Isabella did not relieve herself and she let herself be quickly mounted by Orazio, now she comes out all perspiring. "Pantalone quickly dries her off with his handkerchief telling her that when desire overcomes her, to go ahead and not to suffer." An acrid scene of sex, urine and perspiration that reminds us of the pitiful and unpleasant exit of Messer Nicia [La Mandragola] but that ends in being resolved in the brief laughter of the comical anecdote, when Burattino recounts to the public what it has just seen, the story of Pantalone, Orazio and Isabella and how the cunning wife once finished her loving work came out of the house all perspiring because of the exertion she had undergone and of her pitiful husband who told her that if desire came over her it is best if she gives way and not to hold back, drying the perspiration on her face and caressing her. The game of mirrors (doesn't run 'ad infinitum' like the games of the theatre in the theatre) doesn't exhaust the dominant tone of Il vecchio geloso. In a happy oscillation between unified scenes and scenes of few characters, the climax of life in the countryside scans the unfolding of the action which extends or is interrupted on the rhythm of amusement, of rest and of the break to dine. On the rhythm of the elementary and natural needs (eating, urinating, making love: Burattino takes back his daughter who has already been bethrothed but who does not know how to hoe or plant and he gives her some lessons on how to hoe; Orazio and Isabella break the bedstead in their lovemaking; Pasquella is taken by force; Isabella perspires; Pantalone does not resist the urge to fall asleep; he is impotent), elemental needs and impulses refined by the 'society' of the citizens that are there only for a soujourn.

[65] The Caretaker, p. 35.

[66] ———, p. 25.

[67] The Birthday Party, p. 62.

[68] ----------, pp. 13-4.

[69] The Caretaker, pp. 9, 14, 15, 39, 44.

[70] Godot, p. 11b.

[71] ----------, p. 12.

[72] ----------, p. 31.

[73] Ubu Roi, Engl. text introduction, p. VII.

[74] ----------, p. X.

[75] Godot, pp. 13 a and b.

[76] ----------, p. 28 a and b and 29 a and b.

[77] Eugene Ionesco, La cantatrice chauve in Théâtre d'Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), vol. I. pp. 43-4.

[78] ----------, p. 51.

[79] The Caretaker, pp. 9, 10 and 11.

[80] The Birthday Party, p. 47.

[81] ----------, p. 49.

[82] ----------, p. 50.

CHAPTER III

THEMATIC LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO THEATRES

General Background of the Sixteenth Century

The age from which the commedia dell'arte emerged is an age of many crises. The sixteenth century is the end of the Italian Renaissance and this period is characterized by a political, psychological and artistic breakdown. This is a period marked by wars and continued struggle which is not concentrated in the political sphere but which extends to the social, philosophical, educational, artistic and economic sphere as well. The year 1494[1] marks the beginning of the series of horrible wars that overturned the entire peninsula until the middle of the century. The country, divided into many city states, regions and municipalities, lacked an internal administrative and military cohesion that could defend it from its adversaries. Added to the injurious effect of foreign invasion were the internal struggles within cities and regions. The effect of the wars was disastrous; Italy became the battleground for the two major European powers (France and Spain), and within sixty years it lost all its independence and became the object of Spanish colonization. Political fragmentation was exacerbated. The intellectuals and artists who were closely associated with the courts and who had enjoyed a certain amount of freedom and autonomy were now given administrative, diplomatic and pedagogical responsibilities. Their freedom became severely curtailed so that they became servants of the courts and in the homes of the rich. The politician previously a 'free intellectual,' has now become a bureaucrat and a functionary of the state. The artist, totally subordinated to the needs of the ruling class, becomes a pedant.

It can be noted that the period witnessed many transformations in the superstructure of society. The humanists' attitude was by now being eroded and there was general disagreement between the classicists and the anti-classists, between the utopists and the pragmatists. The humanists had previously established belief in the 'ideal city' ruled by people whose goals were justice, peace and knowledge. This ideal was shattered by the wars and by the technical progress of the age. Instead an attitude of pragmatism prevailed. Because there was a strong need for technical knowledge, ancient philosophical and scientific writings were translated for practical application. This increased technical progress also required specialization which made impossible the humanist ideal of the 'unified' man whose skills are developed in multiple areas.

In addition to the wars, Italy found itself in an economic crisis brought about largely by the geographical discoveries of new routes of trade. This recession extended to agriculture, thereby causing a great shift in population from the rural to the urban centres. The farmers found themselves impoverished and therefore moved to the cities to seek out a living. As a result, the social unity of the city changed into a multi-class mosaic. Of course the rural population that moved into the cities became the lower social class, adopting the heaviest and least paid type of work. With this shift in population and the foreign invasions, Italy found itself fragmented and diversified. It has been suggested that Harlequin's multi-coloured costume represents the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic state of the peninsula. It suggests an image of 'collage' that reflects the spirit of the times.

The dichotomy between the learned culture and popular culture becomes more pronounced. The individual becomes more and more dependent and he

becomes an object of the political decisions of the ruling class. The public is therefore estranged, partly because of foreign rule and partly because of social oppression and class stratification. The individual has very little autonomy left; one of these small margins is his culture. Within these small boundaries the public tries to reconquer its culture. One area in which this finds expression is the theatre. In the learned culture two theatrical tendencies can be discerned: one that represents the moral standards of the ruling class and another which represents reality through the satire of the oppressed class. Commedia dell'arte can be seen as a manifestation of popular culture asserting itself. It is a reaction against classicism and the inert life of the traditional theatre which was dominated by the academies. It destroyed many of the preconceived ideas of the theatre including that of the figure of the poet-creator. It is a theatre in which laughter becomes the chief interpretation of life.

There is one final consideration which bears an influence on the theatrical developments of this period and that is the shift of philosophical and artistic sentiments toward the secular, thereby decreasing the importance of God. The relationship man-God-nature became less restrictive, more open and problematic. Life is perceived to be more a result of the will, and the autonomy of the individual is less dependent on divine intervention. The seeds of individualism are beginning to grow and there is an increased tendency toward the interpretation of the personal experience. Artists confront tradition with their own experiences and begin to break away from their masters' style into the sphere of experimentation. Along with this tendency there was also born the beginnings of professionalism. In the theatre, actors tried to separate themselves from the dependence on the courts. Writers began to compete in the marketplace,

The comedians of the commedia dell'arte began to assert themselves as an autonomous class 'dell'arte'; that is, they see themselves as belonging not only to the world of art but also to a professional organization. It is noteworthy that the first theatrical contract was signed in Padua in the year 1545.

As a result of the enormous changes that occurred in Italy between 1494 and 1559, commedia dell'arte was born into a world full of contradictions and conflicts. The age is marked by such battles as the merchant class versus the feudalists, the humanists versus the scientists, the progressives versus the traditionalists. It is also in a world torn apart by continual war and increased change through technology that this theatre began its existence in the second half of the century. The period described was the commedia's 'incubation' period.

The Themes of the 'Commedia'

Having seen the kind of events that shaped the period from which the commedia dell'arte developed, one can establish some connections between the social atmosphere and the thematic concerns of the commedia. It is here important to note that the commedia flourished in the years between 1550 and 1620 and although it was popular throughout the seventeenth century it really was in a state of change and deterioration after the early half of the seventeenth century. It is noteworthy to see how the concerns of this time permeate the fabric of this theatre. Its masks become living symbols of a nation and its spirit.

One of the areas in which this link with the social events finds expression is in the setting. Firstly, the setting of the commedia became increasingly that of city life which is often completely disassociated

from the life of the courts. This reflects the comedians' struggle for independence from the courts. The commedia asserts its autonomy by presenting works that do not concern themselves with the lives of the ruling class. Secondly, the setting becomes a vehicle to represent the commercial mentality of the times and the multi-class structure of the city. The commedia is also an expression of a new 'Weltanschauung.' It is one which favours personal experience and empiricism over theory. That is why the comedians prefer to show life in action as a more honest kind of mimesis than life of words through narration. Flaminio Scala, who is considered the great experimentalist of this time, argues for the superiority of theatrical rules which are based on experience rather than on theory. He claims that the comic's logic is a natural one based on reason itself.

In the commedia one witnesses also the destruction of the humanist values of perfection of human nature and of cosmic harmony. Life is no longer a state of wisdom and of virtues. On the contrary, it is a chaotic, complexly tangled imbroglio. The commedia dell'arte often resorts to madness as a metaphor for the world that it is presenting. This can be interpreted as a state that represents the general disintegration of the society in which commedia dell'arte had its base. In this theatre, individuals are frequently presented in their struggle to survive. In this competitive state behavioural motivation is not always noble and altruistic but it is often selfish and revengeful and people resort to spying, bargaining, robbing and tale-telling out of survival or sheer mischief. The constant ecclesiastical opposition to the commedia as an immoral profession and as a stage which did not try to correct vices was basically overruled and rendered insignificant when members of the church themselves were frequently

found at the performances.

Perfect morality was neither presented as an innate state of the individual nor was it deemed to be realistic aspiration. Commedia performances were bountiful in disclosing the incidents of corruption that were found throughout the social hierarchy. This was not restricted to the political world but it included the church and other respectable institutions. Amorous scenes were plentiful as were the standard 'affairs' that were condoned. The spirit of the performances was generally one of great moral lassitude. Apparently scenes of nudity were frequent occurrences and no commedia was complete without its courtesan figure.

The optimism that characterized the humanist period had been replaced by an increasing sense of pessimism and of anti-religious sentiments. The pessimism as presented in this theatre is about morality, about destiny and about the progressive view of life. Also this world view is characterized by the violence of everyday life. The 'angst' of the slaves, their fear of being mistreated or sold, the general estrangement of the public, their displacement by the wars and their general helplessness were all very concrete concerns of the sixteenth century Italian citizen. As a metaphor of this 'angst' the mask and the 'travestimento' are very important devices in the theatre. The mask is effective because it detaches the individual from everyday life, thus making him a symbol. The 'travestimento' is also metaphoric because it becomes a deformation in which we, the public, tend to believe in. So the feigned death, the supposed poisoning, the laying down in the coffin are the illusions that fuse with the reality. This is the surrealistic side of this kind of theatre. The question of disguise leads to the theme of identity that arises contin-

ually in the commedia dell'arte. The 'double' is an established device in this theatre. Confusion about identities is the common fare. Eventually all the disguises lead to dramatic irony. Through the complex weavings and the plot manipulations, one loses track of the characters; one cannot keep them straight, so that what happens is that one witnesses the dissolution of personality. Shorn of one's social identity, constantly reversing roles and sex, the individual personality loses its static and solid base and assumes a state of flux and a reality that is continually being challenged. This is significant because the post-humanist experience in Italy at this time was concerned with the exploration of the personal experience which is not necessarily anchored to the social or political self but to the autonomous self. This concern with identity belongs to the spirit of experimentation of the age. It is also a means of asserting certain freedoms, for instance the distance, the disguise and the masks of the theatre create the setting that allows liberty of expression and action. The servants are free to assert their rights when they are in their masters' clothes. The oppressed citizen's sorrows are sanctioned as injustices. The women assert their right to choose a companion (a right which they had been deprived of in everyday life.)

Another conflict arises from stage situations, the one between the young and the old. It reflects the conflict between tradition and experimentation, between learned and popular culture, between the literary and the anti-literary. The cries of these conflicts are heard through the metaphors and the symbols of the theatre; they are the voices of a revolution. Eugenio Levi speaks of this revolution as a point in the dying of an age, as the dissolution of the Italian Renaissance. He speaks of the

anti-literary movement that was manifested in the theatre of the commedia. His words here cited are taken from his book Il comico di carattere da Teofrasto a Pirandello.

> Muove di qui la piú grande rivoluzione contro la letteratura che mai sia stata messa in atto sul teatro. Piú volte questa rivoluzione è parsa dovuta a una spinta venuta dal basso: una specie di 'jacquerie' armata di tutto punto contro il classicismo aulico del Rinascimento. Ma questo è vero solo a patto che si aggiunga che questa spinta s'incontrava con un'altra opposta venuta dall'alto. Un tempo infatti sempre viene in cui diventa antiletteraria, forse per propinarsi l'ultima droga che le prolunghi la vita, anche la letteratura piú raffinata. Si sente insomma anche nella Commedia dell'arte come nelle altre dissoluzione cinquecentesche nella bernesca e nella folenghiana, ma incomparabilmente piú che in esse— l'ultimo Rinascimento, fastoso e morbido, magnifico e frustro, che per un capriccio notturno da gran signore si compiace di travestirsi in panni plebei.[2]

The debate between the classical and the popular does become a heated issue in the theatre. The prologue to one of Flaminio Scala's comedies, Il finto marito, is based precisely on this polemic between the literary traditional theatre and the popular improvised theatre. A sampling of this debate extracts the flavour of the conflict:

Comico: L'arte vera del ben far le commedie credo io che sia di chi ben le rappresenta, perchè se l'esperienza è maestra delle cose, ella può insegnare, a chi ha spirito di ben formare e meglio rappresentare i suggetti recitabili, il ben distenderli ancora, quando però quel tale non sia nato in Voltolina o dove si lascia l'io per il mi. Ma in che consiste, di grazia, cotant'arte?

Forestiero: Nel servare i precetti e nell'imitare il più che sia possibile.

Comico: Chi può sapere meglio i precetti dell'arte che i comici stessi? che ogni giorno gli mettono in pratica esercitandola? e però gl'imparano dall'uso; e chi ha più la vera arte dello imitare di loro? che non solo imitano nelli affeti e proprietà delle azzioni, ma ancora, con l'introdur varie lingue, sono necessitati a procurare di sapere ottimamente imitare, non solo con la propria favella, ma anco con l'altre, perchè se il veneziano parlasse fiorentino et il

fiorentino bergamasco, si darebbe loro i premio con le meluzze!

Forestiero: I precetti bisogna cavarli da' buoni autori che hanno scritto le poetiche, perchè l'imitazione del linguaggio poco vale, se non v'è nel modo del dire e nelle parole l'espressione dell' allegrezza o del dolore, del timore o dell'ardire; che di questo l'oratore et il filosofo ne insegnano il modo, e non il comico.

Comico: Tutti i precetti veramente son buoni, ma il ridurre le cose all'operazione, quello è la essenza di ogni arte o scienza.

Forestiero: Ben dicesti; ma all'operazione bisogna che preceda la regola, o vogliamo dir l'ordine, che da' precetti solamente si cava.

Comico: L'esperienza fa l'arte, perchè molti atti reiterati fanno la regola, e se i precetti da essa si cavano, adunque da tali azzione si viene a pigliar la vera norma, si che il comico può dar regola a' compositori di commedie, ma non già quegli a questi.

Forestiero: Da quanto in qua avete voi preso la forma di sillogizzare?

Comico: La mia è logica naturale, fondata sopra la sola ragione.[3]

In this dramatization of the question one senses the spirit of conflict and confrontations that reigned in this period. Strongly felt is the disagreement between fathers and sons. They belong to two different schools of thought. The master versus the servant is another area of combat. They are nearly always antagonistic; the servants are presented as continuously setting up traps and devising ways to escape their confinement. The conflict of the individual versus society is manifested in different interests between the individual and such institutions as the church, the courts and the academies. The conflicts between the social classes is, of course, always present and often underlined in the feuds between families and in the struggle between the merchant and the landowners.

The anti-classical leanings of the commedia dell'arte are a movement

toward a theatre that is anti-naturalistic and that is a revival of rituals and ancient forms such as the Carnival and the ancient fable. The commedia becomes a kind of mythology in comparison with the tightly structured classical academic plays. In this sense, as in many cases of rebellion, the commedia is a reactionary movement looking for its inspiration in forms which belong either to the distant past or to peripheral spheres of literature and theatre.

The last theme which is prevalent in this theatre is the obvious concern with language. This was a large issue of the times, with the influx of various dialects and foreign rule as well as the changing Italian language. The established Tuscan presided over the other languages which were considered inferior and anti-literary. In the theatre this was asserted as an artificial condition. It was argued that a standardized language that belonged to only one group of people could not be imposed as a natural means of expression on another group to whom the language was foreign. This polemic in the theatre had its roots in social change, the prevailing atmosphere of the times.

The Twentieth Century

Let us now turn to the modern period to see what its characteristics are and if they bear any semblance to those events which shaped the Italian experience of the sixteenth century. The salient features which can be easily identified and which had the most influence are the economic recession of the 1930's, the two world wars and the technological progress of the times. Already from these three chief events a striking comparison results between the two centuries. Let us see what effects these events had on the times and how they infiltrated the post war theatre of the

50's and 60's that this thesis is concerned with. The horrors of the wars had a devastating effect on the entire continent of Europe. The oppression of the Nazi movement which caused the displacement and the destruction of millions of people was, at least in part, responsible for the destruction of a solid and firmly anchored world view based on stability and firm beliefs. Contributing to this change in 'Weltanschauung' were the earlier writings of Freud, Marx and Darwin. Their writings destroyed the foundations of the existing systems of belief. The individual was often left disillusioned at the loss of a secure set of values that had been inherited. The new technological discoveries were also responsible for the shift they created in people's lives. There is a noticeable decline in religious faith and the individual's destiny is less dependent on divine powers. The world is no longer a place of certitudes; all the old certitudes are questioned and they are not replaced by other solid doctrines. It is an age of widespread disillusionment. Like the Italian Renaissance, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a large shift in population from the rural to the urban areas. The result is again a pluralized and stratified picture. The twentieth century is seen largely as an age of break-up, of dissolution and of shattered beliefs and one in which the dominant world view is one of apocalypse and of historical crises.

How do these events affect the theatre? Like the Italian commedia dell'arte, the Theatre of the Absurd is one which grew out of a period of great unrest and change. Both theatres belong to artistic moments which attempt to break with tradition and which are given to great experimentation. In both cases their fight against established forms is directed against naturalism and realism. Both theatres have been described as anti-

literary movements, by Eugenio Levi in his book on the commedia (see footnote no. 2) and by Martin Esslin in his work on the Absurd. Below is the passage taken from Esslin's work:

> The Theatre of the Absurd is thus part of the 'anti-literary' movement of our time, which has found its expression in abstract painting, with its rejection of 'literary' elements in pictures; or in the 'new novel' in France, with its reliance on the description of objects and its rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism.[4]

Like the commedia dell'arte, the Theatre of the Absurd is a theatre that de-emphasized the elements of narration and dialogue and which focused on 'action' or images; it is a theatre of situation and not of events. It tries to represent that which is beyond the ordinary actions of human beings; it attempts to depict the essence, the core and the very substance of being. Antonin Artaud's vehement attack on the naturalistic theatre speaks of a theatre in crisis because it lives under the 'exclusive dictatorship of speech.' He insists that theatre must find a new stage idiom based on physical language. He condemns the contemporary theatre because it is based on 'story-telling psychology' and he promotes a popular theatre that appeals to all the public and not just to the elite who are largely concerned with the emulation of masterpieces. Artaud's strong opposition to the established realistic-naturalistic theatre is clearly stated in the passage that follows. It is clear from his words that he pleads for a return to the old function of the theatre as a ritual, as magic, as a confrontation with myths and with spiritualism and as a rejection of the mere reflection of our ordinary lives.

> ... the theater is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction. It invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies; and we can see, to conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of the theater, like that of the

> plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the masks to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it.[5]

The playwrights that belong to this kind of theatre subscribe to a view of theatre as a living organism based on experience and not on theory. This theatre does not argue about the human condition, it merely presents it. These playwrights are committed to the idea of a 'living theatre.' They view the contemporary theatre as being in a state of decomposition. Beckett calls the naturalistic theatre a 'grotesque fallacy of realistic art.'

Finally we arrive at the concern with language that pervades the works of the Theatre of the Absurd. Artaud describes this linguistic crisis in the following words:

> If confusion is the sign of the times, I see at the root of this confusion a rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation.[6]

Partially caused by the development of mass communication, language ceases to be effective. It becomes devalued. Communication also grows increasingly difficult in the face of growing specialization. This sense is heightened by the cultural chaos created by the ever-growing city that becomes a polyglot. Both historical periods have been described as 'Towers of Babel.' Language along with the other systems are undergoing vast changes.

It can be concluded that both these theatres emerged from periods of great transition. The great changes of the two ages become reflected in metaphors, in symbols and in unique forms on the stage.

Social Themes in the Theatre of the Absurd

Already in the early years of the period that we call Modernism the themes that were to be represented in The Theatre of the Absurd were germinating in a play such as Jarry's Ubu Roi in Paris in 1896. Jarry's work showed the kind of protest that has become associated with the avant-garde theatre. It revolted against the complacency and false visage of naturalism. It concerned itself with a theatrical production that returned to old forms and that violated the current acceptable standards. Ubu Roi is a play that is concerned with showing the most immoderate vices, the theme of corrupt power, the evils of ignorance, the theme of decomposition, the cruelty, social conflicts and the helplessness of the individual. It enters the stage as an ominous statement on the direction in which our society is moving, toward unrest, crisis, domination and apocalypse. He presented the extreme violence that was to be carried out during the wars. He anticipated much of the mood and the themes that are part of the theatre today. He, like the absurdist playwrights, wanted to divorce himself from everyday life and present something 'eternal' that would have a stronger impact on the theatrical public.

Pirandello's theatrical work began some twenty years after the representation of Jarry's Ubu Roi. Nevertheless similar concerns and attitudes continue to be expressed in his drama. The play that I concern myself with in this discussion, Questa sera si recita a soggetto was presented in 1930. The central focus of Pirandello's work is that of crisis and conflict. Largely this is concentrated on questions of the self, the interior reality of the self, the self against the external world. Like the second half of the sixteenth century, this age is one which feels

acutely the movement of individualism. The tensions are centred in the relationship between illusion and reality, normality and abnormality. Pirandello's theatre is one which presents that modern world view in which the solid beliefs of the previous age have been dissolved and hence one in which everything becomes problematic. It is a theatrical world in which the playwright tries to confront the myths and the truths that lie beyond the precarious appearances of everyday life. In Questa sera in particular, there is a sense of revolt against theatrical conventions. Pirandello tries to dismantle the image of the all-powerful director by having him diminished in physical stature and by having his characters not heed to his tyranous rule. The characters having been invested with a life of their own, assert their freedom of expression by refusing to abide by Hinkfuss's direction. They sever the chains from their old masters and embark upon improvisation, hence they play 'a soggetto' as is stated in the title. Isn't this resonant of a previous battle fought on the Italian stage some two hundred and fifty years earlier in which the commedia's characters asserted their independence by forming into professional companies and staging their own works? The words 'a soggetto' or 'to improvise' are also a metaphor for the shattering of the imposed order on the theatre. It is a device that introduces the idea of chaos as a more honest reality than the contrived order of the naturalistic theatre. The characters loosened from the directorial constrictions create a theatrical 'pastiche' of their own which has no inherent structure and which creates a lot of confusion. The chaos in the theatre is a further metaphor for that which happens outside in the real world. This production is divested of certainties. The audience cannot make out when the play begins; there is

no clear line of demarcation between the play and the intermission because the players continue to perform skits after the intermission has been announced. The director comes on stage and argues with the audience and with the players so that one is not certain whether this is the play or the rehearsal. The characters appear at times in their theatrical roles and at other times as their real selves. The result is an increasing sense of confusion so that the spectator can no longer distinguish between art and life, between illusion and reality. This is a similar effect to that which was achieved by the commedia artists who performed multiple acts of disguise.

With Beckett, a figure very central to the development of the Absurd, we arrive at a point of maturity in this theatre. Waiting for Godot reflects the concern of the age most acutely and most intensely. The perpetual 'angst' caused by the interminable and purposeless waiting and by the general sense of uncertainty is bewildering. It mirrors an age which has been called 'The Age of Anxiety.'[7] The play also reflects the painful state of existence. It exhibits numerous incidents of both physical and psychological pain. There are the beatings, the intense pain of the boots, the nightmares, and Lucky's open sores all of which are reflections of a world whose inhabitants are deeply wounded. The uncertainty that is expressed throughout the play echoes the pluralist world views that our modern age has produced. Vladimir wonders why "of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there- or thereabouts- and only one speaks of a thief being saved."[8] On the set there is a tree by which Vladimir and Estragon are to meet Godot but in looking at it Estragon admits that it looks more like a bush and Vladimir adds that to him it looks like a shrub.[9] Later on in the play, Estragon expresses

uncertainty about the colour of his boots. Black becomes a 'kind of grey' and brown becomes a 'kind of green.'[10] These are only some of the minor uncertainties that are expressed in the work, but the overall feeling pervades the work. The two characters are not able to arrive at any definite statement about anything. Beginning with Godot, the most undefined element of all, and ending with the question of their identity Beckett's two tramps occupy a world on whose reality they have a very tenuous hold.

Through the setting there is also the image of a world in a state of deterioration. The play's setting is the bog, the muck heap which exhibits violence and engenders fear. It is a barren landscape inhabited by two tramps in tattered clothing who seem to have fallen into a desperately hopeless state from which they have difficulty rising.

In addition there is the sense of oppression and loss of freedom that is embodied in Lucky who is subjugated to his master's most trivial needs and flippant desires. It is intimated that Lucky was previously an artist but his art has now become servile to the demands of Pozzo. Once a flourishing artist (he taught Pozzo many beautiful things), he now has deteriorated to an animal-like state, to a state of humiliation and degradation. He has no freedom. He is ordered to think, to dance and to sing. The play communicates the extreme disillusionment of the age; the non-heroic human being clad to tramp-like figures is alienated in their suffering and their fear is magnified by an insensitive and indifferent figure like Godot. The images are bleak and somber; they are the charnel-house and the wasteland. But like the commedia dell'arte, it is life seen through laughter. The stasis and the insignificance of the human condition are rendered

comical by the transformation of the horror into the mythical, the fable, the clown and the joke.

In the airless and paranoia-filled works of Pinter's plays there is the stagnant air of destruction and deterioration which is characteristic of a post-war world. This playwright presents a world that has been torn apart and that is suffering the ramifications of two catastrophic world wars and one which is still slowly nursing its wounds. The scars incurred by these events are deeply felt in the individuals' lives. In The Birthday Party the character Stanley, wounded, frustrated and alienated has receded into a sheltered world. He seeks security in his confinement and in his relationship with the mother figure Meg. Stanley is standing on the threshold of a personal breakdown. The theme of madness continues to be the dominant metaphor for a world in a state of decline. In this play, as in Waiting for Godot, one encounters the artist figure who has lost the freedom of expression. Stanley talks of playing the piano around the world and of the time that he gave a successful concert. But he immediately recounts how after the concert he was "carved up" and how at his next concert, he finds the hall "all shuttered up."[11] He is prevented entry. The images that stand out are those of violence and of the individual's alienation. The artist has been suppressed and stripped of his rights.

Identity is another key issue in Pinter's works. In both The Birthday Party and The Caretaker the characters have changed their names and go under assumed names. They are very secretive about their real identity and in both cases there are implications that these characters are being persecuted and subjected to various forms of violence. Like the world of the commedia dell'arte and like the world of Godot, the world of Pinter's

works is one which offends its inhabitants. It is a world of suffering, of disguises and one which is concerned with questions of the self in relation to society, in relation to politics and in relation to its past. Anxiety is a strong element in many of Pinter's characters. Aston in The Caretaker is overwhelmed by it when he recalls his time in an asylum. Anxiety takes many forms from Davies' incessant worry about his shoes to Stanley's extreme form of anxiety which progresses from pangs of guilt to schizophrenia.

The Caretaker also reflects the jaded concerns of a generation that has placed too much importance on their material existence. There is also evidence of dissension between generations. Aston represents a generation which has lived through the painful involvement of war. He is a symbol for a 'lost generation' which has receded into a world concerned with introspection, creativity and one which has no social ambitions nor any faith in the world of capitalism and of commercialism. On the other hand, Mick, the younger brother, hasn't lived through the experience of revolution or war and therefore he tends to be full of beliefs and optimism. His concerns are with external issues such as the work ethic, progress, professional success and upward mobility. Unlike Aston, his beliefs have not been shattered. He can neither sense nor understand the crisis that Aston lives with. As in the commedia dell'arte, these differences represent the battles that are fought by differing factions or across the generations.

In the same vein as the plays previously discussed, Pinter's theatrical works represent cities as racial and linguistic mosaics which have not learned to house all the different groups harmoniously. In The Caretaker there is talk of foreigners, of blacks and of Greeks. In addition to being a place of great diversification, the city is a seat of violence and

perversion. Often Pinter's plays represent a world that is contaminated by depravity and prostitution. It is generally a world whose images are those of fear, violence and horror. It is a broken world of sickness and disillusionment which become metaphors for the spirit of the time.

From the parallels that have been drawn it can be established that the Theatre of the Absurd finds a distant relative in the commedia dell'arte. This kind of study is made possible because of the avant-garde's eclectic nature. Operating at a time when traditions have broken down, The Theatre of the Absurd draws its elements from various places. It is not discriminatory in this sense because it gathers its elements from multiple sources often uniting what was previously considered as contradictory. The two theatres here studied are most akin in their humour. The experience of both these phenomena has common characteristics such as an affinity with surrealism which is tinged with the pleasurable indulgement in nonsense, in the senses and in the imagination. Because the emphasis is on action and not on speech, the appeal in both is to the visual, through its lasting images and its mechanical movements. It reconstructs the atmosphere of a Carnival where the freakish characters hamming it up arouse a dual reaction of horror and laughter. I think it is this careful balance that makes these theatres effective and gains them wide appeal. Largely they operate on contrasts. It is all fun and routines on the surface with a serious mood underneath. Also they both present a kind of criticism couched in laughter for both limit themselves to social criticism mostly attained through the forms of parody and satire. Their critical nature arises from the fact that they are reactionary movements strongly opposed to naturalism and realism. But their rebellion is not limited to only

artistic forms but it is also aimed against the events that shape the worlds that they inhabit. It is this brand of serious comedy that characterizes both; Charlie Chaplin calls this effect a defiance that keeps us from insanity. He says: "In the creation of comedy, it is paradoxical that tragedy stimulates the spirit of ridicule; because ridicule, I suppose, is an attitude of defiance: we must laugh in the face of our helplessness against the forces of nature - or go insane."[12]

NOTES

[1] The year 1494 is the year in which Charles VIII, King of France, entered Italy and although his presence only lasted until 1495, it marked the beginning of a period of foreign rule in Italy. The discovery of Italy's weaknesses in the military and political spheres led to continued invasions and eventual foreign rule.

[2] Eugenio Levi, Il comico di carattere da Teofrasto a Pirandello (Novara: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1959), p. 66. My own translation of the passage follows:

> From here there follows the largest revolution against literature that has ever been put into action in the theatre. More often this revolution has seemed to be due to a push from the 'low literatures,' a kind of 'jacquerie' armed with everything against the Aulic classicism of the Renaissance. But this is true only if it is added that this push was met by another one, from the opposite side, the 'high literatures.' A time, in fact, always comes when it becomes anti-literary, maybe to administer to itself the last drug which could prolong its life, it uses even the most refined literature. One senses on the whole, even in the Commedia dell'arte as in the other dissolutions of the sixteenth century - as in those of Berni and Folengo, but incomparably stronger than in them - the last moments of the Renaissance, pompous and delicate, magnificent and decayed, that for a nocturnal caprice, changes its clothes from those of a grand lord to the ones of a humble plebeian.

[3] Flaminio Scala, Il teatro delle favole rappresentative, vol. I, ed. Ferruccio Marotti (Milan: Edizioni il Polifico, 1976), Appendice VII, pp. CX-CXI. My own translation of the dialogue follows:

> Comedian: I think that the real art of making good comedies lies in representing them well because experience is the teacher of things; she can teach him who has the spirit of modelling how to better represent the subjects to be recited and how to develop well that subject as long as that he is not born in Voltolina where they use the I for the me. But in what kinds of graces does this art consist of?

Foreigner: In the honouring of the rules and in imitation as much as possible.

Comedian: Who but the comics themselves can know better the rules of art, after all, they use them everyday in practice. And they learn from their use. Who but them knows the real art of imitation? They not only imitate the effects and the correctness of actions, but with the introduction of various languages, they are required to know how to imitate excellently, not only in their own tongue but also in that of others, because if the Venetian would speak Florentine and the Florentine Bergamesk, one would give them a grand prize.

Foreigner: The rules must be derived from good writers of poetics, because imitation of speech is worthless unless it is coupled with the way of expression which allows words to express such feelings as happiness, pain, fear and zeal. It is the orator and the philosopher who teach us this and not the comedian.

Comedian: All rules are truly good but to reduce things to practice is the essence of every art and science.

Foreigner: Well said, but it is necessary that the rules precede the practice, or in other words, the order of things can only be derived from the rules.

Comedian: Experience makes art, because many tries make the rule and if the rules are derived from testing, then from such actions one can get the real principle. So then the comedian can give the rules to the writers of comedies and not the other way around.

Foreigner: Since when have you taken to making syllogisms?

Comedian: Mine is a natural logic based on the only reason.

[4] Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p. 7.

[5] Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, tr. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1958), pp. 31-2.

[6] Artaud, p. 7.

[7] Marshall McLuhan calls it by this name in the introduction to his book, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), p. 5. Here I quote the entire passage.

> The Theatre of the Absurd dramatizes this recent dilemma of Western man, the man of action who appears not be involved in the action. Such is the origin and appeal of Samuel Beckett's clowns. After three thousand years of specialist explosion and of increasing specialism and alienation in the technological extensions of our bodies, our world has become compressional by dramatic reversal. As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree. It is this implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be contained, in the political sense of limited association. They are now involved in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media.
>
> This is the Age of Anxiety for the reason of the electric implosion that compels commitment and participation, quite regardless of any 'point of view.' The partial and specialized character of the viewpoint, however noble, will not serve at all in the electric age. At the information level the same upset has occurred with the substitution of the inclusive image for the mere viewpoint. If the nineteenth century was the age of the editorial chair, ours is the century of the psychiatrists' couch. As extension of man the chair is a specialist ablation of the posterior, a sort of ablative absolute of backside, whereas, the couch extends the integral being. The psychiatrist employs the couch, since it removes the temptation to express private points of view and obviates the need to rationalize events.

[8] Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, tr. by author (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954), p. 9a.

[9] Beckett, p. 10a.

[10] Beckett, p. 43b.

[11] Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), p. 23.

[12] Charles Chaplin, My Autobiography (London: The Bodley Head, 1964), p. 327.

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